

OUR VIEWS CONSENSUS OPINION

Power plays

SGA’s treatment of budget, stipends lacks sensibility

As the difficulties of crafting next year’s budget weigh on the Student Government Association, this week’s unexpected news that SGA has cut many Tier 2 student stipends, while maintaining its own pay rates and even, in the case of the graduates, approving raises, is inexplicable.

Following last week’s budget recommendations by the Joint Finance Committee, which the Undergraduate House of Representatives and Graduate Student Senate were to vote on this week, a Student Stipend Committee was formed at the last minute to review student positions paid for by the Student Activity Fee. This committee met with Tier 2 organization leaders on Sunday, and in the case of the *Technique*, there was no indication that the JFC’s recommendations (which set almost all staff salaries at the same rate as last year) would be changed before voting.

Instead, and without any notification or insight into the deliberation process, this ad hoc committee decided to arbitrarily classify student positions into six categories that cap the maximum salary students can receive from SGA funds. Come Tuesday, student leaders had received no warning that their budgets could be drastically cut or any recourse.

Although the existence of this Stipend Committee has been characterized by the rushed, opaque way in which it has operated, the reason for forming the committee is certainly fair. Comparable work across disparate student organizations should receive comparable pay, and we know this is not currently the case. But to form this committee only days before a final vote, for the committee to interview leaders but fail to obtain enough specific information on the responsibilities of student workers in order to make an educated classification, and for the committee to remain silent and fail to provide any documentation that would shed some much-needed light on its role in the last-minute budget amendments is a blatant abuse of power.

If these decisions—and the murky manner in which they were undertaken—were necessary due to budget constraints, then SGA officials would have applied the same type of unsupported scrutiny to their own salaries. Using budget constraints as an excuse seems like the easy way out when the global economy is hurting, but the number of students (and thus SGA revenue) continues to increase.

Not only are JFC guidelines being ignored without any explanation, but there is no body to provide oversight and ensure that SGA does not abuse students’ trust by refusing transparency, effective and timely communication, and fair and informed decision making to speed and secrecy. Having already passed these budget cuts, there are no avenues left for organizations who feel wronged to air their grievances.

SGA has exercised its will with little thought as to whether the Student Stipend Committee’s 11th-hour deliberations made sense, were necessary or actually worked to the benefit of the students that these representatives were elected to serve. Rather than taking the time to look further into the unexpected recommendations, the UHR and GSS seem to have passed budgets in haste so they could leave their marathon budget meetings.

The way in which SGA has crafted this year’s budget is filled with instances of abuse of power. Using threats of zero funding that apparently they didn’t intend to carry out (as in the case of the *Blueprint*) as a means to exert influence and make a statement based on personal viewpoints is a poor governance tactic that has no place in SGA, as is GSS cutting IFC funding to make a political statement to UHR.

The actions of student government during this process leave much to be desired and suggest a dire need for increased communication, accountability and transparency. Student organizations, and the students they serve, deserve better.

The Consensus Opinion reflects the majority opinion of the Editorial Board of the Technique, but not necessarily the opinions of individual editors.

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SGA budget behavior a disgrace to themselves, student body

By Craig Tabita
Editor-in-Chief

Normally I have admired the individuals in SGA for the often thankless hard work they put in around their busy school schedules. Recent activity, however, has made me embarrassed that these people carry the flag of student leadership and control millions of dollars of Student Activity Fees. I can’t ignore their deficiencies when they result in massive cuts to crucial positions in Tier 2 organizations such as my staff, our sister publications’ staffs and Interfraternity Council officers. Meanwhile, SGA chooses to keep its own myriad of vice presidents and other executives at the same high pay rates, even leaving the door open for raises for some.

SGA’s Joint Finance Committee (JFC) has diverged from any semblance of proper organization and transparency in the recommendations they return to the Undergraduate House of Representatives (UHR) and Graduate Student Senate (GSS). These legislative bodies have foolishly continued to assume that the JFC is reviewing funding requests with a consistent and well thought out set of criteria, when in fact they are making up policy as they go.

The JFC released their recommendations for the fiscal year 2010 budget in March, leading organizations in the budget to believe those would be the exact recommendations presented to SGA. JFC members proceeded to make two new sets of last-minute recommendations that remained internal until they were put up for vote this Tuesday.

The latter of these recommendations, which the UHR and GSS approved with little deviation, came from a temporary Stipend Committee formed last week for the purpose of readjusting all the paid student positions listed in the Tier 2 budget. JFC Chair Austin Rahn later told me that the purpose of the Stipend Committee was not to reduce overall student stipends but to enforce fairness in pay across organizations. This is a noble pursuit but a demanding one as well. Even a well-managed committee could not possibly have arrived at accurate outcomes in less than a week, let alone sufficiently in advance of Tuesday’s votes to allow a response from affected organizations. For an example of the importance of advance notice, the *Blueprint* was able to convince UHR to provide a \$40,000 printing budget after the JFC recommended zero dollars because they had several weeks to make a case.

The product of this Stipend Committee is a list of six categories with maximum pay amounts into which each Tier 2 paid student position was inserted. The first thing I noticed in the table is that the two SGA presidents are the sole occupants of the highest

tier, while my position falls on the second. While SGA has traditionally budgeted each of these the same, next year the presidents will outpace the editor at least \$1,000. Although this doesn’t affect any paychecks I’ll ever receive, I’m still biased so I’ll let you decide whether this is something that deserved even one second of public discussion before SGA convened to vote.

Much more egregious to me is the slashing in half of most of the rest of our editorial board positions and the 75 percent cut in assistant editor positions. I can sincerely state that next year’s News Editor will put in over 15 hours of work per week keeping tabs on what’s going on around campus with administration, campus crime, student groups and academics; managing his or her staff of writers and developing new writers; editing their work; investigating leads and reporting on typically one or more stories per week; and designing layouts that will require them to stay awake Wednesday nights often until the sun rises on Thursday. The JFC, and by accord the members of UHR and GSS, think this service is worth less than \$4 per hour to the students of our Institute.

The Stipend Committee’s knowledge of how to pay our positions is presumably based on a hastily organized, superficial interview they performed with me on Sunday. Never once did they ask me about the responsibilities of assistant editors, who are crucial to our paper and put in 5-10 hours per issue every week. Yet somehow, SGA decided this work merits less than \$2 per hour.

Not only did the tone of our interview indicate that we would receive the full amount of funding requested (which JFC had already recommended), Stipend Committee Chair Kimberly LeBlanc specifically told me that the Editor-in-Chief would receive a recommended raise which I did not request. Furthermore, another committee member acknowledged that given the fluid nature of our staffing, we (like some other larger groups on campus) can distribute payroll more efficiently from a lump sum than is possible through an evaluation of individual positions (which ended up being beyond their capability). Evidently they either radically changed their minds within two days or lied to me.

If we were given even a simple explanation of why SGA thought we were overpaid and our stipends should be so cut, I might understand. However, neither Rahn nor anyone else in SGA will provide useful answers, nor is any documentation of their process public.

It certainly would be much easier to accept these cuts if SGA had exhibited leadership and started with themselves. Unfortunately such a show of character might be too much to ask of the current crop.

Complaints are means for change at Tech

Tomorrow (April 11) is my birthday. For my birthday, this is what I want: for just one day out of the week next week, I want everyone at Tech to stop complaining aloud about Ma Tech, “The Shaft,” professors making random changes to their syllabi, Stinger and Trolley drivers, not stopping or walking off the buses randomly, seemingly reasonless SGA Joint Finance Committee decision or any of the hundreds of things Tech students whine about (sometimes rightfully so) on a daily basis.

Instead I would like for everyone to take that complaint, write it down on a list and at the end of the day send emails to the relevant parties for each issue you had. If we as students simply sit back and take these perceived maladministrations lying down, then posterity will forever have the same grievances against Tech as we.

This is the reasoning I supply my fellow Tech students with when confronted with the question: why do all your editorials just whine and complain about things at Tech? Can't you ever just be happy about something that Tech does? Anyone who knows me knows that I love Tech. I'm a second generation-Tech alumnus (following my father, EE '74 and '77). I haven't missed a home football game since I was a freshman. I have Tech stickers on my car, Tech floor mats,



“...Stop and appreciate the good things at Tech, then write down the bad things and do something about it.”

Blake Israel
Online Editor

a Tech doormat at my house and more yellow and gold T-shirts than I can handle,

I have helped friends at other schools register, work through financial aid processes and done a multitude of other seemingly mundane activities. My experience has been that no other college or university in the southeast provides as much assistance and support to their student body as Tech.

Our financial aid department is beyond equal, they have provided timely and accurate aid every time I have been there (which is a lot). The advisors in every college at Tech I have visited provided me with the answers to my questions with unparalleled speed and efficiency. Overall, the critical infrastructure of Tech (Registrar, Bursar, Advising and Financial aid) is truly leaps and bounds ahead of the rest of Georgia and beyond.

The point of all this is not for you to think Tech is perfect. Far from it; nothing is perfect. The more we as stu-

dents push both the administration and our fellow students to achieve better results in every aspect of life at Tech, not only will our own experiences be enhanced, but so will those of future generations of RATs and alumni, not even counting the value it will add to your diploma post-graduation.

There are many things to still gripe about: Transportation, Dining, Housing and Student Government are just a few. Several of these have come a long way, but most could still use some work. The Stingers are improving, but I still have drivers leaving me stranded, seemingly randomly, for five minutes or more at a time while they exit the bus. I haven't been to a dining hall in about three years, and while Woodie's was overhauled while I was still eating there, I hear the food still oozes grease quite frequently. Lord knows we've all heard a ton about SGA's JFC cutting everyone's budgets this past fortnight.

I do not suggest that during

your day of non-complaining that you be forced to think Tech is awesome. But stop and appreciate the good things at Tech, then write down the bad things and do something about it. Complacency will not make things any better.

The heads of every department—Transportation, Dining, Housing, Auxiliary Services—can all be found on their websites. You might be surprised when they actually respond to you. I personally have had some good discussions with some of these people and they seem to truly value student input (a recurring theme in the *Nique's* consensus pieces).

The same goes for your SGA representatives. I recently called up several representatives, some within my department and some without, to express my discontent with the JFC's recommendations on certain publications' budgets and was delighted to receive positive responses that were actually fulfilled during voting. All of the SGA representatives' emails can be found with one or two clicks at www.sga.gatech.edu/people

So please, if for nothing else than as a birthday present to me, write, call, email, fax or do something to express your opinions, good, bad or neutral to those who can listen. If all else fails, the *Technique* is always looking for good writers.

BUZZ

Around the Campus

Did you benefit from the expanded summer schedule?



Fenging Yu
Second-year INTA

“I'm taking MGT and INTA classes, but my options are still very limited.”



Rahul Bhatia
Fourth-year ME

“I'm taking Heat Transfer and Systems Lab, [but] no.”



Brian-Paul Gude
Third-year IE

“Yes, it encourages me to stay and offers more for me to take during the summer.”



Daniel Wang
Third-year CE

“They added more classes?”

Photos by Sarah Chang and Weili Huang

Affirmative action can lead to catch-22

I was at a minority recruiting event the other day for graduate school, when a student (a “diversity applicant,” as she was likely labeled by the admissions committee) asked what I thought was an unnecessary question: “What efforts are there at the university to recruit African-American and Latino professors?”

In response to the question, a dean tried to reassure the audience that the university attracted top minority scholars who almost always received tenure. He was quick to add that this was due to the quality of their work and not their race or ethnicity. While I appreciated the clarification, I was beginning to tire of the event. Session after session, it began to reek of an affirmative action love fest.

I tried to think ahead to the time when, if all goes well, I'll be a professor. Would I want to be known as a “top female Hispanic economist” or just a “top economist?” I think the answer is clear. What's unclear is to what extent these factors come into play in academia and other fields. Based on bits and pieces I've gathered from students and professors at various universities, I have come to believe that belonging to an under-represented group does serve as an advantage. It's just hard to tell how big and how unfair of one.

The problem with affirmative action (whether acknowl-



“...the last thing I want is for someone to look at me and think, ‘She must have been a minority admit.’”

Naihobe Gonzalez
Opinions Editor

edged or not) is that it is far from simple. I would not realistically denounce efforts to even out the playing field or make certain professions more diverse. After all, these are legitimate ends that serve a greater social purpose. But I can't always make up my mind as to when this obsession with diversity can become counter-productive.

Take the field of academia. The National Science Foundation gives millions of dollars each year for various minority research and support programs. I have taken advantage of some of these opportunities, and feel I have them to thank for my graduate school outcomes. As a minority, I do not always have access to the same opportunities as, say, a white male at an Ivy, and I am glad that these programs exist.

But as someone who wants to think of herself as “capable” before “minority,” I have begun to engage in some self-doubt as to whether my admission into competitive schools had more to do with my ethnicity than

my ability. The easiest thing to do is to shrug it off—who cares *why* I got in somewhere or *why* I was given funding? Now that I'm in, I can prove myself, minority or not.

Still, would I feel the same way if I was of a different race or nationality? In addition to labeling U.S. students who are “diversity applicants,” I have also learned that schools make the distinction between Asians and non-Asians. Again, this strategy makes sense in order to increase diversity, not just out of what conservative pundits may call “liberal guilt,” but also to create a more balanced learning environment.

I've heard more than once that if admissions in economics were solely based on proven technical ability, some entering classes would be shockingly homogenous. But if I was a qualified Chinese applicant who had to jump through more hoops than an American one to gain admission or funding into a program, I may be a bit more upset. In this case, justice trumps fairness.

YOUR VIEWS LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

OUR VIEWS HOT OR NOT
HOT-or-NOT



Election outcomes

SGA elections are one step closer to wrapping up, with two candidates—Kristie Champlin and Alina Staskevicius—moving on to the runoff next week. While total turnout remained low, about 700 more students performed their civic duty this year as compared to last. Greater certainty about next year's leadership—and not being bombarded with flippers—is always good.

Drought drags on

The good news is that the drought is technically over in Georgia thanks to a really wet month of March. The bad news is that the Lake Lanier Basin, on which most of metro Atlanta depends for water, is not. Climatologists say we should all continue to practice water conservation into the hot summer months coming up. So long green lawns and sparkling pools?



Tennis love

Women's tennis has carried an impressive winning streak, with seven straight wins to celebrate this season. The streak began March 21 with a win over number 20 ranked Virginia and continued through Sunday's Senior Day against Maryland. The team is now ranked sixth in the nation and tied for second place in the ACC. Just one more reason to be proud to be a Yellow Jacket.

Never-ending story

Construction at the North Avenue Apartments has persisted months past the projected end date at the end of 2008. Offering residents earplugs is, unfortunately, not enough to help the loud, early-morning hammering that continues to wake sleepy students. We know construction will never end at Tech, but at least this one project should have reached its end by now.

SGA executives explain budget

Over the past few weeks, the Student Government Association has been diligently finishing next year's budget. As the budgeting process can be somewhat complex, there have been several questions and concerns raised by organizations concerning their funding.

We hope to clear up some of the common misunderstandings and offer some history and background to this year's budgeting process.

Every year the Mandatory Student Fee Advisory Committee, a group of appointed student leaders and administrators, meet in the fall to decide upon the following year's Activity Fee request. Because of the Board of Regents' forced Tuition Fee this semester and the increasing cost of education that we foresaw for Fall 2010, we opted not to raise the Student Activity Fee.

With that said, because we held the Activity Fee at its current level, we have had to tighten our belts and truly evaluate every line item in the budget. Unfortunately, in prior years a true evaluation of the budget has not always taken place and we applaud this year's House, Senate and Joint Finance Committee for taking up that task.

Because we are currently still in deliberations over the budget, it is premature to address individual organizations' budgets and their budget cuts. Albeit, there will always be some organizations that will see a budget reduction below what they believe they needed or deserved.

These organizations may come back next year and submit a bill requesting further funding. In total, SGA received requests for over \$5.3 million in spending, whereas

our maximum allocation can only be \$4.3 million. Why make these organizations come back before SGA and request funds?

We are required to balance next year's budget with our projected revenues for next year, but because we often have funds that are rolled over at the end of each year, additional funding is available for these organizations through the bill process. It is important for organizations to realize that the funding process is a multifaceted process and yearly budget allocations are not the only means of funding.

If your organization has any questions about SGA or the budgeting process, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Aaron Fowler
Graduate Student Body
President

Nick Wellkamp
Undergraduate Student Body
President

Austin Rahn
SGA Vice President
of Finance

Internet news obscures reading priorities

I greatly enjoyed Ben Keyserling's opinion article [Real news doesn't belong on the internet," April 3] on the disadvantages of moving the news to primarily online formatting.

His point about the competition between what's important and what's recent in online news reporting is excellent. I find that as a result, the diversity of my

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letters@nique.net

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reading suffers as well. When reading a newspaper, I am able to glance through the pages to find new and interesting articles about topics I had previously known nothing about.

Online, I read only those things that I'm already interested in or knowledgeable about or those whose titles are so intriguing that I am inclined to click through to the article.

Though quicker and more efficient in terms of information transfer, conversion to electronic media leaves the consumer with more choices but diminished ability to discriminate between them.

That said, how anyone did research before keyword searches came along is beyond me.

Joel Boerckel
ME graduate student

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the guy in chbe who plays hockey is super hot and the bald guy whos his friend just not as much how 'bout it, big trendy?

It really sucks that I keep getting all these bruises from Emily kicking and hitting me. I don't mean to make her mad. Emily probably officially hates me now! :-)

It can be a whale or an airfoil....definitely whale!!!

Want a date?? Then maybe you should have come to the date auction.

I think Zhang is hot guggenheim is fun to say I bought a girl at the date auction, and she was hot. =P My roommate is weird. i sat next to you on the couch and you said we "cuddled" wtf!?! you wish.

to the dude who is super pissed about girl's sunglasses: guess sometimes girls wear clothing that WE like... not to attract boys and esp not to attract boys who get mad over sunglasses.. who cares..

i have a cat in my dorm room for the weekend... shhh dont tell anyone