February 23, 2009

Ms. Kerry Hodak  
Ad hoc Committee for the Review of the  
Student Activity Fee  
Council on Student Affairs  
Office of the University Senate  
Independence Hall  
Campus

Dear Ms. Hodak:

The Senate Fiscal Committee looks forward to meeting with you during its meeting on Tuesday, March 3 to discuss the proposed increase in the student activity fee. The committee reviewed your draft proposal last week and discussed it at length. I think it's fair to say that the committee was impressed with the breadth and detail of your proposal, and it was clear that a great deal of background research and planning went into its development.

The primary role of the Senate Fiscal Committee is to advise the President, Provost, and Senior Vice President for Business and Finance on issues that have major fiscal implications. The faculty, students, senior staff, and administrators that comprise the committee bring a remarkable breadth and depth of experience to the committee's work, and that experience often manifests itself in spirited discussion. It is the committee's practice to assist those who bring issues to it by compiling a list of areas of interest and concern that can serve to help guide the discussion and supply input. The list of ideas, questions, and concerns that arose during our discussion of your proposal is attached. Although the list might at first appear somewhat daunting, please understand that it was assembled in the spirit of cooperation and consultation. We hope your discussions with the Senate Fiscal Committee will help sharpen and strengthen your proposal in advance of its being submitted to the central administration for consideration.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Ralph E.J. Boerner  
Professor and SFC Chair

College of Biological Sciences
Questions concerning the proposed increase in the Student Activity Fee  
Senate Fiscal Committee, 17 February 2009

It was unclear from the proposal how the Student Activity Fee is currently administered, and a flow chart indicating how both funds and responsibility flow would have been helpful. What is the relationship between the ad hoc committee bringing forward this proposal and the University office ultimately responsible for administering the funds? Has this proposal been reviewed and endorsed by that office? If so, a letter of endorsement should be attached to the proposal before it moves forward.

This proposal requests funding for a number of new staff positions for fiscal administration and oversight, and seems to suggest that there is currently little of either in place. Given the large amount of money presently allocated to student activities and a proposed increase that runs into millions of dollars, it seems essential that you present a much more detailed description of how funds are currently administered and accounted for, and how such fiscal accountability would be enhanced by adding significant staff.

Dr. Javeune Adams-Gaston has only recently assumed the leadership of the Office of Student Affairs, and we assume she is still in the process of developing her vision for the office and its programs. How does this proposal fit within Vice President Adams-Gaston's vision and philosophy for student activities? Does it have her approval? Would it be better to wait until she has completed her strategic planning process? One could envision a situation in which programs proposed here for additional support or elimination might not be the ones that a broader plan for student activities would identify. It seemed to the Committee that it might be unwise to recommend the addition of new student fees to support a list of activities in advance of the new Vice President's strategic plan.

Is this an appropriate time to propose a fee increase? Might it be wiser to wait until other general fee increases the students currently are funding (such as RPAC or the new Ohio Union) expire before adding on another increase?

Would this proposal be taken forward if the current cap on tuition and fees is maintained for 2009-2010 or beyond? Similarly, should reductions in funding from the State of Ohio that result in an increase in the tuition and fees, would other financial issues impacting students affect the timing of this request?

How does this plan fit with the new housing strategic plan? Would this increase in student activity funding include additional services for sophomores that would be called for if/when sophomore housing on campus is required? Would sophomore housing require another hike in the student activity fee, and if so, when?

In terms of absolute dollars, an increase of $10 to bring the fee from $15 to $25 would seem modest. However, such an increase represents a relative increase of 66.6%. How would you respond to critics who suggest that this is too aggressive given the current economic conditions?

Are there any current or newly proposed services that might be better offered to students on an "opt-in" basis, such as has been proposed for the legal services fee? This might
preclude the need for an across-the-board increase. Similarly, student choosing to attend or participate in major events (e.g. concerts) could be charged a nominal fee (e.g. $3.00), and this could serve to both increase the funds available for support of such events and better align payment for services with the constituency benefiting from those specific services. It seems the people value more what they have to pay for than what they receive for free.

Are there different mixes of services for off-campus and on-campus resident students that might justify a different student activity fee structure for each category? In the same vein, should there be separate fee structures for undergraduate, graduate, and professional students? Is it possible that better alignment of services with the population actually being served might preclude the need for an across-the-board increase?

There seems to be a strong focus on providing more events to students. What is the overall benefit to the students of increasing these types of events? What are these events important to the intellectual life of the campus? The proposal states that an increase in such events will attract top students and help to address University District issues. Upon what are such sweeping statements based?

In the same vein, is there a list of events/activities that should be eliminated (based on impact, efficacy, utility, attendance, priority, etc.) to free up funds that could be used for new programs instead of increasing the fee? Can a prioritized list of initiatives (both current and proposed) be provided? Could an enriched suite of student activities be supported, at least partially, by eliminating programs that are not heavily used by students or by seeking efficiencies in the current structure?

Almost $200,000 is requested for office and media equipment for the offices and operations of student organizations once they move into the new Ohio Union. Funding plans for new buildings always include funds for office furniture, office equipment, and other necessary business items. How much is currently allocated for office furniture and equipment for student organizations in the Ohio Union plan?

It appears from the proposal that funding for the basic operations of the Ohio Union cannot be separated from funding for student organizations and activities through the Student Activity Fee. Is it possible that funding lines for POM and Ohio Union administration could be separated from those devoted to student programming in such a manner that an increase in one does not necessitate a decrease in the other?

Two items for you to consider as you revise your proposal: (1) There are many programs, offices, and initiatives described that were unfamiliar to the University Senate Fiscal Committee members. Without some background information on the services offered by entities such as SOURCE and Explore Columbus, it is difficult to muster enthusiasm for additional funding for them; and (2) the unusual font used in the proposal was difficult for many to read and interpret. A more standard font would make your proposal appear much more professional and credible.