The Student Activities Commission (SAC) is the largest advisory board under the purview of the Finance and Appropriations Committee (FinApp) regularly receiving in excess of 25% of the total Student Activities Fee (SAF). As such, SAC’s operational health is of utmost importance to the university community. A thorough review of FY19-FY20 funding applications, budget reports, and the FY18-FY20 audit has resulted in the following findings:

**Commitment to Objectivity and Equity**

SAC has an established track record of objectivity and equitable treatment of its organizations throughout its funding operations. SAC’s Budget Guide stipulates how all events are funded, placing rigid caps on certain expenditures to control overall costs. Organizations have access to the Budget Guide and make budget requests according to its constraints twice annually during SAC’s semesterly internal budget summit. Large events and travel, which are typically of a more unpredictable nature, are funded separately during an ongoing ad hoc process which ensures that budget allocations are responsibly made on the most accurate information. While club budget requests consistently exceed SAC’s total FinApp allocation, SAC makes no judgement on the merits of any club’s programming and therefore elects to implement uniform cuts to ensure that funding constraints are met without compromising its equitable treatment of all organizations.

Two specific points were made in the FY19 and FY21 applications to specifically highlight SAC’s commitment to objectivity. The FY19 application cited a challenging decision made to defer to university policy and not defund Love Saxa[[1]](#footnote-0) despite the personal biases and beliefs of SAC commissioners. The FY21 application noted that the commission has received no bias complaints indicating that its “policy of following the Budget Guide essentially to the letter is proving successful.”

This commitment to objectivity however has made it difficult to reduce spending as SAC is not able to dictate what events are to be funded based on the commissioners’ judgement of an event’s merit.

**Rising Funding Needs Negatively Impact the Community**

Over the past three funding cycles SAC has continuously highlighted the internal strains on its budget due to the growth of the campus community. Over the years the level of programming has increased substantially both in number of events and in financial size, even as SAC has taken increased measures to ensure that only eligible clubs are receiving benefits. SAF allocations to SAC have not met this growth in programming, resulting in recent reserve spending, which SAC is mandated to maintain at approximately $100,000. The situation is somewhat exacerbated by the high variation in the number of clubs entering the New Club Development (NCD) process and drawing down SAC funds during the ad hoc process.

The impact is that SAC is unable to fully fund all programming and must place restrictions on funding available per event. For example, only three travel events are ever funded to a maximum of 60% for the first event, 40% for the second, and 20% for the third. Financial demand that significantly outstrips funds available creates an environment in which clubs feel let down by the process and moreover prevents SAC from pursuing ongoing goals focused on accessibility and affordability. In the FY19 funding application, SAC noted that it had removed caps on travel funding to make it more accessible to low income students, resulting in a record number of travel events. However, the very next year SACs application noted that they had to reinstate travel funding limits due to financial constraints.

**GUPD, Space and Equipment Costs**

Mentioned in the FY19 application, GUPD, space, and equipment costs continue to be a major concern for SAC organizations. These costs are currently funded by SAC in full. Previous FinApp senators have called on the Council of Advisory Boards (CAB) to spearhead an initiative to pursue cost reform.

**Internal Records**

The recent funding applications and financial audit have indicated that SAC’s current records and data access are limited. This is largely due to CSE policies and practices. SAC has however implemented a new internal audit that will allow it to keep better track of operations.

**Need for New Club Development Reform**

The current process for students to create new clubs on campus requires following the NCD process led by CAB. Each semester, new organizations apply to enter NCD and are then assigned to an appropriate advisory board by CAB. The majority of NCD clubs are assigned to SAC and receive funding through its ad hoc process. While caps have been placed on the amount of funding that each NCD club can receive per semester, SAC has no control over the number of clubs assigned to it each semester. SACs FY19 application noted, “CAB often admits new organizations and assigns them to SAC without the consent of SAC itself, which is arguably the only board with the real authority to know what SAC has the ability to take on in terms of new clubs [*sic*].” Further due to SAC’s reputation as the “umbrella advisory board,” it is assigned many clubs that may have fit better within a different advisory board. This places unpredictable and undue strain on SACs financial resources each semester.

**Recommendations**

SACs funding challenges are largely a byproduct of external forces. Programming levels have been rising over time and the funds allocated to SAC have not kept pace, resulting in frustration on the part of clubs when their needs are subsequently not met. Moreover, SAC’s objectivity prevents commissioners from passing judgement on what some may consider to be “wasteful spending.” Finally, CABs handling of the NCD process further strains SAC’s ad hoc funds by assigning clubs to SAC oversight without consultation.

With regard to NCD, FinApp previously called upon CAB to reform the NCD process in order to reduce the burden on SAC, however more changes are likely needed. This could take the form of assigning NCD club funding responsibility entirely to CAB to ensure that CAB fully understands the financial implications caused by NCD clubs and will therefore make the appropriate adjustments to the process. This would require CAB to request funds during FinApp’s annual budget summit if implemented.

Overall, SAC’s former liaison Matthew Buckwald (COL’20) accurately highlighted SAC’s present situation in the FY20 budget report when he said, “SAC’s Budget Guide regulations are some of the most stringent and focused rules on this campus, necessarily so considering the amount of clubs they fund. This can only go so far in terms of being fiscally responsible. The long term concern for both SAC and FinApp is just how tall the order is for their internal Budget Summit.”

Ultimately to improve SAC and the community, more funding is needed as dictated by the current state of programming on campus. This can occur either through top line growth or reduced expenses, but once again in the interest of remaining objective and due to the already stringent nature of the SAC Budget Guide there is only so much that can be done. SAC could potentially find ways to encourage organizations to think critically about expenditures, but it must be cautious to do so without dictating what programming clubs should or should not pursue. Recent trends however are ultimately pointing to an increased Student Activity Fee to meet the current needs of the community, which have changed since it was set.

1. <https://thehoya.com/students-call-defund-love-saxa/>

   <https://thehoya.com/love-saxa-keeps-university-funding-pending-appeal/> [↑](#footnote-ref-0)