



The Science Students' Council Policy on
Restructuring the Faculty of Science and
Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry
Student Levy

June 2017

Authors:

Danny Chang
President

Andriy Katyukha
Vice-President Finance

Jacob Ferguson
Research and Policy Commissioner

Introduction

In 1994, the Undergraduate Teaching Equipment Fund was signed by the Faculty of Science and the Science Students' Council, an agreement where Science students were asked to contribute a student levy of \$75.00 on an annual basis to "purchase or update equipment used in undergraduate Science courses and to cover its installation or maintenance costs".¹ Following its inception, the Science Students' Endowment Fund, derived from the Science students' levy and the annual graduating class gift, was created to support special student initiatives.² The Science Students' Council has also established the Science Student Donation Allocation Committee (SSDAC), which is responsible for the fair disbursement of the Undergraduate Teaching Equipment Fund (also known as the "SSDAC Fund"). Over time, the scope of the use of the Science students' donation has changed in the eyes of students, and this changed view has impacted the disbursement of the SSDAC Fund. This policy aims to update the criteria of the the Undergraduate Teaching Equipment Fund and in extension, the Science Students' Endowment Fund, based on recommendations of Science students and the Science Students' Council.

Purpose of the Science Student Donation

Principle: *Tuition fees should be used to cover necessary materials and resources that students attending Western would expect to receive from a course/program.*

Principle: *The Science Student Donation Fee is a voluntary donation fee intended to contribute to improving the student experience for students in the faculty of Science and Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry.*

Concern: *Student donation fees allocated from the Science Student Donation Allocation Committee (SSDAC) have been used to finance costs in-line with tuition fees.*

Recommendation: *That the SSDAC fund should not be used to fund the minimum requirement for necessary materials and resources for students in a course/program in the faculties of Science and Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry.*

Over the past decade, tuition of students studying in the physical, life, and computer sciences has increased by \$2,934 across the province.³ Ontario universities continue to rely heavily on student fees as a source of operating revenue; Western students currently contribute to 33% of the university's revenue (2016).⁴ As tuition and ancillary fees continue to be an increasing financial barrier for students at Western, students should expect a continued dedication from the University and their respective faculty to the quality of their program and its course content.

The Science Students' Council believes that the purpose of a goodwill donation offered by students should be used to enhance the student experience beyond what is required for an undergraduate program or course to operate. However, several SSDAC applications have been used as ways for faculty to solicit funding for basic and necessary materials for their courses and modules. The Science Students' Council would like to ensure that SSDAC funds which are granted to faculty members and departments are not being used to subsidize a need from funding which would normally come from tuition.

¹ Science Student Levy: Undergraduate Teaching Equipment Fund. Faculty of Science, Science Students' Council. March 9, 1994

² The Science Students' Endowment Fund. Faculty of Science, Foundation Western, Science Students' Council. May 2001

³ Statistics Canada, "Weighted undergraduate tuition fees." 2016

⁴ https://www.uwo.ca/finance/forms/docs/corporate_accounting/2016.pdf

Transparency of the SSDAC Fund

Principle: *Students paying the Science Student Donation Fee should be able to track the use and progress of the SSDAC fund granted to departments/programs.*

Concern: *There currently is a lack of transparency in the detailed record of the justification of SSDAC decisions.*

Recommendation: *That a member of the SSDAC committee document the deliberative process of the allocation of SSDAC funds to be made available to the public.*

The Science Students' Council believes that every student who is contributing to the SSDAC Fund should be able to access information regarding the use of their donation within the faculty of Science and Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry. This commitment is consistent with the Student Council organizations of other faculties at the University of Western Ontario. For instance, the Social Science Students' Council outlines a requirement for recording and publicizing minutes from Social Science Student Donation Fund meetings.

Accountability

Principle: *It is important to ensure that dispensed SSDAC grants are spent in accordance with the purpose for which they were requested.*

Principle: *Donations provided by students should be allocated with a high degree of scrutiny and utilized as transparently as possible.*

Concern: *There currently lacks an accountability mechanism to follow-up with departments/modules that have requested and received funding from the SSDAC, ensuring the funds are being used correctly and that the impact on students is being assessed.*

Recommendation: *Departments/modules should provide a brief description of the purpose for which the fund was spent and/or provide receipts or other proof-of-purchase information indicating that the fund money was spent as intended.*

The Science Students' Council believes that accountability for student donations is paramount for the betterment of the student experience and for the success of proposed initiatives from departments/module. Any department or module who has received funding from the SSDAC shall be responsible for reporting to the Science Students' Council, Faculty of Science administration and/or Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry administration (as applicable) regarding the spending of their received funds.

SSDAC Membership

Principle: *The stated membership of the SSDAC in various documents should be identical in order to remove ambiguity about the membership of the Committee.*

Concern: *There is currently a disparity between the composition of the committee as outlined by the Undergraduate Teaching Fund agreement and the Constitution of the SSC.*

Recommendation: *The SSC believes that the SSDAC should be composed of the President (voting), VP Finance (voting), Student Services Commissioner (voting), 3 general council members (voting), Academic Dean of Science (non-voting), and the Vice Dean of Medical Sciences (non-voting).*

Recommendation: *That the VP Finance should serve as Chair of the Committee, as was discussed this year (2016-2017) among committee members. All applications should be addressed to the VP Finance.*

The Science Students' Council believes that the Undergraduate Teaching Fund agreement must be updated to accurately reflect the SSDAC membership. The Science Students' Council also believes that the VP Finance is best suited to chair the SSDAC, as financial disbursement is within the VP Finance portfolio.

Committee Process

Principle: *SSDAC members must hold a strong commitment to the committee and its processes, ensuring proper use of student donation fees for faculty peers.*

Concern: *The election/appointment process for the SSDAC is currently not outlined by the SSC constitution.*

Concern: *There currently are no measures for committee members who may have a perceived conflict of interest, including but not limited to members deciding on funding allocation for their respective department(s) of study or members completing research in a lab or for a professor directly affected by a particular SSDAC fund application.*

Recommendation: *That the 3 general council members selected to be on the SSDAC will have been elected by the SSC provided, with voting occurring after each candidate has 2 minutes to speak in front of the SSC.*

Recommendation: *That the other members of the SSDAC may vote upon a member of the SSDAC to abstain from voting on a particular SSDAC grant proposal due to a perceived conflict of interest. This vote will be decided by a majority of votes.*

The Science Students' Council believes that the members of the SSDAC must be held to a high level of commitment and expectation of fairness in their role on the committee. The recommendations provided above hope to ensure a thorough selection process, representative of Science students, and a fair deliberation process for the SSDAC Fund grants.

Expansion of the SSDAC Application

Principle: *In order to properly distribute the SSDAC fund, the SSDAC must be given sufficient information in the grant requests to adjudicate the request's value.*

Principle: *There should be a set list of considerations for the SSDAC fund in-line with the fund's vision and mandate.*

Concern: *A detailed application process for applicants of the SSDAC fund currently does not exist, creating both barriers for the applicant (unable to fully articulate the importance of their request) and the SSDAC (not enough information to make informed decisions).*

Concern: *There currently does not exist a particular set of criteria upon which the SSDAC fund is allocated.*

Recommendation: *The SSC should adopt a more extensive funding grant process, before, during, and after approval of the grant, similar to other faculty and affiliate councils on campus.*

Recommendation: *That the SSDAC adopt a set of criteria for SSDAC fund applications including, but not limited to, the overall cost of the proposal, the impact on students in the department/faculty, the duration of student/department/faculty benefit, and the anticipated student interest for the initiative being proposed.*

Recommendation: *That the SSDAC vote upon a specific set of application requirements based on both previous SSDAC applications and this policy (Restructuring Student Donation Fees in the Faculty of Science and Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry).*

The Science Students' Council believes that there should be a detailed and standardized procedure for applying for, deliberating upon, and disbursing SSDAC Fund grants. For applicants, this will ensure the ability to clearly articulate one's request, and will also provide an expectation of the process of applying for/receiving a SSDAC Fund grant in the future. For the SSDAC, this will ensure a fair and thorough procedure for the deliberation process of SSDAC Fund applications. As chair of the SSDAC, the VP Finance shall ensure that departments/department chairs understand and are encouraged to apply for SSDAC Fund grants in order to improve the experience for students in their respective departments.

Donation Fund Allocation

Principle: *The allocation of the SSDAC fund should be based on a fair cost-sharing model for departments in the faculties of Science and Medical Sciences.*

Concern: *There currently are no measures in place to ensure fair cost-sharing of the SSDAC fund.*

Recommendation: *That the SSDAC fund allocation to departments/programs in both Science and Medical Sciences is divided similarly to the proportion of students in the faculty of Science and the Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry.*

The Science Students' Council recognizes that the principle of equity should be applied to the granting of the SSDAC Fund. According to facts and figures released by Western University and the Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry, approximately 4,679 students were enrolled in an

Undergraduate Science program⁵ and approximately 894 students were enrolled in an upper-year Undergraduate Medical Sciences program⁶. The Science Students' Council believes that, with the help of the Academic Dean of Science and the Vice Dean of Medical Sciences, the SSDAC should allocate the SSDAC fund on an enrolment basis of the Faculty of Science and the Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry.

Donation Fund Scope

Principle: *The SSC believes that the overall student experience of students in the faculties of Science and Medical Sciences includes co-curricular activities and student programming.*

Principle: *Both Western University and the University Students' Council pride themselves in offering "the best student experience", ranging from activities in health and wellness to student clubs.*

Concern: *The SSDAC Fund currently only service departments and programs, which only address the academic facet of the student experience.*

Concern: *The Student Endowment Fund and its allocation to the student experience is not allocated by student representatives*

Concern: *The current Student Group Grants fund distributed by the SSC is not enough to properly service students and student groups in the faculty. The Student Group Grants consumes almost one-third of the SSC's operating budget, taking away from funding availability of SSC members and committees to provide services to Science/Medical Sciences students.*

Recommendation: *That a portion of the Student Donation Fee shall be allocated towards a student experience portfolio, allocated by the Science Students' Council, which will include, but is not limited to, the Student Group Grants and a seed fund for SSC initiatives.*

The Science Students' Council believes that co-curricular activities and student programming are essential to the student experience, a belief that is echoed by Western University⁷ and the University Students' Council at Western⁸. While the Science Students' Council recognizes the value of supporting innovation within the classroom, a portion of the SSDAC Fund should be allocated towards student-facing initiatives outside of the classroom. In a survey published in 2014, conducted by the Science Students' Council, roughly 31% of respondents indicated that the Science Student Donation fee should be partially allocated towards "student life events" with similar short answer responses expressing support for student-facing initiatives such as student lounge spaces, faculty dances, clubs in Science, scholarships, and more work/lab integrated opportunities.

The Science Students' Council believes that there are currently financial barriers inhibiting student groups on campus and the Science Students' Council from providing better co-curricular experiences and programming for students in the faculty of Science and the Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry. Currently, the Student Group Grants and the funds allocated for Executive and Council honoraria on the Science Students' Council collectively consume about two-thirds of the Science Students' Council's operating budget for an academic year, restricting both the ability to provide grant funding for various student groups and the financial flexibility for the Science Students' Council to provide better programming and services through various focuses, such as academic events, charity initiatives, the events portfolio, and marketing initiatives to students. The Social Science Students' Council currently allocates \$20,000 of student donation fees (the total fee is \$50 per student) each year towards their

⁵ <http://www.uwo.ca/about/whoweare/facts.html>

⁶ https://www.schulich.uwo.ca/about/who_we_are/facts_and_figures.html

⁷ http://welcome.uwo.ca/student_experience/index.html

⁸ <http://westernusc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Long-Term-Plan-2017-Dear-Students-web-version.pdf>

equivalent of a student group grant (SOGS)⁹, contrasted against the Science Student Group Grant which has historically ranged from \$4000-5000 a year. The Faculty of Health Sciences Students' Council and the students' associations of each of the Schools of Health Studies, Kinesiology and Nursing also have their Student Opportunity Fund (SOF)¹⁰, which is derived from their student donation fee of \$100; this fund, however, is open for applications from both the faculty council and other students' associations for student programming if initiatives are inclusive of all students in the faculty. The Faculty of Information & Media Studies Students' Council currently operates a similar fund, the Undergraduate Student Fund (USF)¹¹, open to students in the faculty to apply to benefit the student experience for the faculty. The University Students' Council (USC) also has a grants fund paid for by students in the form of a separate ancillary fee¹², which is subject to change by recommendation to council by the Secretary-Treasurer.

The Science Students' Council believes that a student experience portfolio should be created out of a portion of the current Science Student Donation Fee, which would be allocated autonomously by the Science Students' Council. This portfolio would be geared towards students and their experiences outside of the classroom; it would include a new, higher-valued Student Group Grant fund open to undergraduate students/student groups in the Faculty of Science and Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry and other student experience related initiatives run by the Science Students' Council, such as scholarships and seed funding for large scale events/initiatives.

⁹ <http://ssscwestern.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/SDFContract2017FINALDraft.pdf>

¹⁰ <http://www.uwo.ca/fhs/students/sof.html>

¹¹ http://intra2.fims.uwo.ca/acad_programs/undergrad/mit/studentfund.htm

¹² http://westernusc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Grants_Policy_Mar6-12.pdf