



Memorandum

To: ASOSU Congress and Other Interested Parties
From: Rep. Ethan Hampton
Date: January 17th, 2022
Subject: ASOSU Student Fees Decision Package #4

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Oregon State University
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ASOSU Congress,

While reviewing the proposed student fees for FY2023, I noted that decision package #4 proposed by ASOSU would cut professional staff position(s) for student government. This wasn't something that to my knowledge had been discussed with the wider group and I wanted to look into it more. This memorandum documents some of my findings and thoughts on this specific decision package. I won't be diving into the student pay aspect of the package, as I believe it to be important and some version of it should be passed regardless of stance on professional positions.

More generally, I find the student fees proposed this year to be reasonable. I'm slightly concerned at the overall increase alongside the proposal to remove summer fees, however the whole package is manageable.

When I refer to ASOSU in this document, unless otherwise specified, I refer to ASOSU Student Government. I also want to note that in certain sections I am doing my best to summarize the opinions of others, this document may not be a perfect reflection of their thoughts. There hasn't been great communication on this subject and this is an attempt to bridge that gap. If others want to share their opinions, I would strongly recommend it so Congress isn't hearing from them through secondary sources. This isn't an easy topic to discuss however it is also at the very core of our student government and deserves attention.

All opinions are my own unless otherwise stated, and don't represent the opinions of the ASOSU Government. All grammatical mistakes and typos are also my own, please alert me to them and I'll fix them the best I can :)

Actual Decision Package

The decision package proposes to reduce funding for professional staff down to a single position. The previous advisor positions would be replaced with a single advocate position as detailed below. In addition, the decision package will increase funding for student members of the government.

After a meeting with Dhru and Dylan, I have a better understanding of the new position that they would like to be created. Namely:

- Based in a college (talks ongoing with School of Public Policy), would not report to Student Affairs
 - As such, gets all the benefits and perks that our advisors get right now

- Not an independent contractor in the legal sense
- Can still access OSU services as an employee (reserve meeting rooms, be on listservs, access OSU-only services, etc)
- Would report to ASOSU senior leadership, though actual reporting pipeline would be through the college (notably, NOT through Student Affairs)
- The new administrative position would not be responsible for the supervision of Office of Advocacy or SafeRide
- Student Affairs would pay for a liaison which handles more of the administrative thing
- Would assist with transition process, student fee process and student advising in much the same way as the current advisor positions
- Student focused

Frankly from my perspective, this “new” role feels a lot like an ideal advisor job listing. Not much is different, other than the fact that they don’t report to Student Affairs. This is a big shift, but unlikely to affect day-to-day operations.

Stated Goals of Proponents

Proponents of ASOSU-DP#4 want to see ASOSU increase separation from the Division of Student Affairs of OSU. After talks with the ASOSU President and Vice-President, Student Affairs has agreed to pay the salary of a liaison to ASOSU, so our professional staff would no longer fulfill that duty.

Note: To my knowledge, this agreement isn’t in any way formalized, and in my opinion should be ignored until a more concrete plan is finalized. My opinion is that the advocate model can happen separately from decreasing professional staff funding.

Proponents want to see ASOSU move towards an “advocate” model for professional staff. In their mind, ASOSU would control the hiring process and they would effectively be independent contractors, similar to ASOSU Congress. They would report to students in ASOSU and serve to assist them in the all the ways our professional staff do now without reporting directly to Student Affairs.

Note: Per OSU business practices and HR policies, students can not serve as supervisors for professional faculty/staff. Additionally, policy states students are not the hiring authority at OSU.

Proponents feel that most issues of conflict within the OSU student community come out of Student Affairs and to have a professional staffer reporting to Student Affairs doesn’t allow for as much separation as they would like. Proponents say they would ideally hire someone already in or familiar with OSU and the ASOSU community. This would go a long way towards continuance of government and reduce training effort.

The professional staff would continue to help ASOSU in the ways they do now, just without the “interference” of Student Affairs. For example both current staff and staff under this new model would be tasked with: the transition process between administrations, student fee process, working 1:1 with students to help them progress and define their agendas, etc.

Proponents say that it is very unlikely that this new position will not be filled. If for whatever reason it isn’t filled, the Division of Student Affairs has agreed to continue to backfill the position as they have been done in the past (**Note:** again, this isn’t a formalized agreement to my knowledge).

Concerns

Several members of Congress (including myself) and other invested parties have expressed concern at this decision package.

Doesn't Need a Decision Package

One of the biggest concerns is the speed at which this package is progressing without any clear communication about what exactly the implementation looks like. All of the information I have seen so far seems to indicate that there isn't anything in this switch that explicitly relies on the decision package. We could move to the "advocate" system without cutting the pro-staff line item and if we find we don't need the money, then remove it next cycle. If we remove the funding, that limits our options especially since agreements and plans aren't finalized.

Professional Staff Wouldn't Have Room For Development

The proposed decision package strips the MGV310 line item (professional staff) of all funding except for the salary and OPE funds for a single professional staff member. Funds that existed prior for supplies, professional development, etc. have been reduced to \$0. Currently professional staff are in Assistant Director and Coordinator level roles which integrate well into the overall university job progression system and provide easy ways of advancement. If we change the role to an independent contractor then those advancement opportunities through the university are cut off, severely limiting upward mobility. That can be really isolating, especially when other staff around you do have those opportunities. Even if the official job title revolved around the advocate phraseology, I'm not sure there is an existing clear advancement path. I know I wouldn't want to be in a job where I couldn't advance, where are we going to find people who do?

Continues Trend Away From Servant Leadership

This isn't something that has been talked about this year, though I'm sure it was brought up as wages were introduced to members of Congress. As we further embrace wages for members of government, we further encourage them to do the work they are assigned, no more, no less. An hours increase would go a long way to increasing the work able to be done, however that doesn't scale forever. This is especially true as students are limited to 20 hours of pay a week. Leading because you want to serve students and leading because you get paid are two very separate things.

To be clear, I'm not against what is going on right now or what is proposed with student government wages, however I think there is value in thinking about it purposefully.

No Concrete Plan

As we enter into the time to approve budgets, there is no concrete plan that has been broadly shared about how we plan to go about the proposed transition. I consider planning and thorough forethought to



be a critical component of any decision and there hasn't been anything shared with the broader ASOSU government in that regard.

Professional Staff Serve as Continuance of Government

Professional staff serve a critical role as the chief officers for continuance of government. Students don't have the time to be training and bringing the next wave of elected officials up to speed on their new duties. Not only that, but professional staff are often the bridge between administrations, helping smooth the way between changes to executive policy and other actions that benefit from having a historical context.

Students aren't always right (shocker I know). When professional staff report to inept or malicious (knowingly or unknowingly) student actors, they can cause irreparable harm to the institution of ASOSU. Just look at the federal government these past few years, either administration, and you can find plenty of examples of this. Students often want things to move fast, but unfortunately this often is counter to the intended promise of democracy. Things moving fast in the right direction means that it is often just as easy to move in the opposite direction. Having long term strategic goals at ASOSU means working on something over many administrations, and professional staff can help facilitate that. If they report to the executive branch, this reduces that ability.

No Promise That Plan Will Be Executed

There is no way to insure that the plan promised by Dhru and Dylan will come to fruition. Both of them don't have any "skin in the game" next year. What happens if the next administration decides to scrap this?

Even if we pass this decision package, there is no assurance that the funds have to be used in this way. As long as the funds are used for the same line item (which this decision package doesn't change) there is no limit in that regard.

Hides The True Cost Of Student Hours Increases

By removing a professional staff position and adjusting student hours in the same decision package, it hides the true financial impact of those hours increases. The hours increases amount to \$184,654 which is close to triple the net cost of the decision package.

Actions I Will Be Taking During Joint-Session

Here is my current plan for the joint session where we discuss the ASOSU Fee Bill:

- A brief mention of my issues with decision package #4 and reference this memo, including the questions within it

- This will include yielding some time to the President/Vice-President to speak their opinion. This will also include a warning to keep their responses brief and to the point. I will be judiciously reclaiming my time if answers are extended.
- Discussion about DP #4
- When discussion seems to have settled (or people seem to agree there is value in additional discussion outside of the joint meeting), I will motion for a roll call vote to take the ASOSU Fee Bill to mediation with an explicit focus on Decision Package #4
 - If you think the decision package deserves more discussion, vote “Aye”
 - If you think the decision package is fine the way it is or doesn’t deserve more discussion, vote “Nay”

I don’t have any particular expectations for the result of the vote. I will be fine with either outcome, but want to provide the body a final opportunity to intervene if they so desire.

Questions I Plan To Ask The President/Vice-President

These are also helpful to put you in a frame of mind to question the viability of this plan. I likely won’t have time for all of these, I’ll try to pull only the most important ones.

- Was there any involvement in the decision making process to bring this forward from anyone not a body leader or an executive leader? (a yes or no answer is fine here)
 - Fairly certain the answer is no here, but I’d be happy to be surprised
- What is the perceived harm from your perspective to remove this reduction from the decision package?
- What assurances do we have that this plan will be executed as expected?
- In a private meeting there was mention of a taskforce to set up the position description and get the ball rolling on this. Can you please describe who is sitting on that taskforce and go into more detail about what exactly are the goals it seeks to accomplish?
- Other than the perceived increase to autonomy, what are the benefits to students?
- What are the disadvantages to students?
 - I’m expecting more than “there are none”. There are always pros and cons
- Has this plan been discussed with the university administration? What are their thoughts?
- What is the current state of execution? What are you waiting on to move forward other than the passage of this bill?

Conclusion

Although this decision package makes up less than a quarter percent of the overall budget, it has significant repercussions across the scope of ASOSU leadership. We must be purposeful in our changes to structure. This memo is a step in the right direction, but more transparency is needed from higher levels of the ASOSU government. I don't need or want a seat at the table where these proposals are created, I want – at minimum – a notification about what the proposal is and why the government leaders are moving it forward.

This document is dripping in my opinion. As a member of ASOSU Congress, I encourage you to develop your own opinion on the subject and share it! It doesn't do the institution any good if we keep silent, and it causes no harm if we are vocal.

Finally, I want to thank you for reading all of this. I know it is a long read, and not exactly the sort of thing you want to be reading during the term. Thank you for sticking with me!

Revisions

Revision	Date	Changes
V1	17-Jan-2022	Initial release
V2	18-Jan-2022	Revised on feedback from initial release: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clarified and added notes to “Stated Goals of Proponents” regarding OSU policy and status of agreements - Removed unconfirmed requirements - Added concrete language for the “Professional Staff Wouldn't Have Room For Development” concern - Removed “Not Intended For Broad Release” footer
V3	19-Jan-2022	Fix circular wording of who Student Affairs is providing a liaison to