

# A Letter From The Editor

Contributed by Paul Bonamy, Editor-In-Chief  
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On Tuesday, March 11, it was discovered that Activities Board had a deficit in their account. This caused a number of people to begin looking into precisely how big a deficit existed in the Activities Board account, and what caused the deficit, but was not overly concerning as student organizations do, occasionally, operate at a deficit for a short time.

Friday, March 14, Michelle Thalacker, Director of Student Activities and Leadership Development and advisor to the Activities Board, sent an email (included below) to a group of student leaders explaining that the Activities Board had been inadvertently allowed to build up a deficit of approximately \$52,000. An additional \$22,000 is tied up in contracts for events for the remainder of the semester, bringing the projected deficit up to \$74,000. This letter was also distributed to the representatives of Student Government by their advisor, Dr. Ken Peress, Vice President for Student Affairs. Everyone confronted by news of this deficit seems to ask the same question: How did this happen?

My understanding is this: Ms. Thalacker, along with her other duties, is responsible for managing the Activities Board budget. At the beginning of the school year, as she was setting up a projected budget for the Board, Ms. Thalacker accidentally copied the wrong value from last year's spreadsheet. Rather than starting with an estimate based on the Board's actual budget, she instead started from an adjusted figure which included a sizable, one time only, rollover the Board received last year. With an estimated budget that doesn't match the actual budget, it's easy to understand how the Activities Board could have found itself with a sizable deficit.

That a deficit could have developed is understandable, but how could it have grown this big? Shouldn't something, somewhere, have sounded an alarm as soon as the Activities Board account got close to zero? According to the Business Office, Banner (the University's financial software) doesn't generate warnings when accounts go into the red. Instead, the University relies on "Budget Managers" within the various departments to keep tabs on the state of departmental accounts. This job is akin to managing a checking account without getting bank statements every month: you have to be very careful to not only monitor your spending, but also to call the bank now and again to make sure your numbers match. As Ms. Thalacker is the Budget Manager tasked with monitoring not only the Activities Board account, but also the accounts of the other student organizations, including The Compass, there was no one else paying close enough attention to Activities Board's finances to spot the deficit before it got out of hand.

Activities Board is the major force behind all of the major events and activities going on on campus. They arrange for bands, comedians, bowling, and even movie passes. They are involved with just about every event students participate in. Like the other student organizations, doesn't make money for itself during the course of its operations. Instead, they rely on funding provided to the organizations at the beginning of each semester. With a deficit in their account, the Activities Board has no way to fund events, making campus a very boring place indeed.

Activities Board's funding is drawn from the Student Activities and Media fee. The SAM fee, as it's called, is a \$35 dollar fee paid by all of the students at Lake State, which is used to fund the student groups on campus. While the math covering who gets what is a little hairy, the Activities Board ends up getting just shy of \$8 per student, which is quite modest compared to the number of events they put on during the year (The Compass gets about \$3.40). The rest of the fee is spread out amongst the Student Government (\$5.23), Presidents' Council (\$2.73), WLSO (\$2.50), Inter-Greek Council (\$0.68), and the Judiciary Board (\$0.23), with the remaining \$12.25 going into a Discretionary Fund overseen by the Discretionary Funding Committee.

The Discretionary Funding Committee is more or less a grant-giving organization. The other major campus groups can bring a request for funding before the DFC, which then decides whether or not to fund that request. Precisely why groups go to DFC varies. The Compass and WLSO tend to go for money to purchase equipment like new microphones and computers. Presidents' Council goes for additional funding to distribute to its constituent clubs, and so forth.

In theory, it would be possible to fix Activities Board's deficit out of the DFC. The trouble is that, as of this writing, there is only \$64,431.63 in the Discretionary Fund. It would be possible to correct some of the problem with the money in the Fund, but it can't solve the whole thing. Some other solution must be found.

I have naught but the utmost respect for Amy Chrispell, Director of the Activities Board, and all of the people who work with her to provide events for us to enjoy. They are some of the hardest working people I know, juggling class, work, and an insane number of hours for Activities Board, and I am honored to call many of them friends. I am certain that with time and understanding we can rectify the missteps that led to this dilemma, and emerge stronger for it.

Tuesday, March 25, the leaders of the various student organizations will be meeting to try and figure out precisely what caused Activities Board's deficit, and what needs to be done to correct it. We'll need help to figure

everything out, and I invite you, our fellow students, to ask questions and share your insight with us. Together we are stronger, and smarter, than we will ever be apart.

Now is not the time for blame, for name calling, or accusations. Now is the time to work together to find a solution to a problem that effects all of us. Only by understanding the situation can we work to remedy it, and prevent it from happening in the future.

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