

## To The Editor:

Contributed by Dr. Kenneth Peress, Vice President for Student Affairs  
Friday, 18 April 2008

April 8, 2008 Dear Editor, I've been asked by a number of our student leaders to address the matter of the overspending of SAM funds allocated to the Programming Board for 2007-2008. In a previous issue of The Compass, the paper printed a letter from Michelle Thalacker that provided both an explanation and her sincere apologies regarding the matter. This matter has also been discussed at a number of open meetings of the Student Government, in meetings of the Big Seven and in meetings with many of our student leaders and representatives. Since the situation surfaced, Michelle has been working to address the matter as have some student leaders (most notably, Amy Chrispell and Doug Anger). Aside from making sure that we fully understand the current situation and how it evolved, we have been working on both immediate action and solutions, and implementing procedures at all levels to prevent this from happening again. Among our efforts in this semester is a request voiced at Tuesday night's (April 8, 2008) Student Government meeting — specifically asking all groups to look at purchases/ expenses that might be delayed until next fiscal year while still operating normally. Another has been to become more creative in how we can reduce expenses for upcoming events this year and next — a good example is the cooperation being offered by our food service managers after meeting with Michelle and members of the Activities Board to help reduce the cost of our annual Luau event. We are also looking at the potential of getting matching funds for two events held this spring. Since this matter has come to light people have expressed their displeasure with it, their anger over it, their desire to make things right and the need to prevent a similar occurrence. I both applaud and admire Michelle's handling of the situation — her immediate release of the information to the student leadership and her meetings with students is indicative of her character and integrity — those are the very qualities that resulted in her being named the Advisor of the Year by Student Government last year. If more of our leaders who make mistakes handled them and behaved as she did, we'd get more accomplished in the aftermath of such situations. I think it's time to stop the recriminations and put our energies into finding solutions to the immediate issues as well as the long term issues. One last point on the matter of the overspending of these funds — all of the monies went into and/or supported programs and activities for students and student groups. Regarding long term issues, I have made a suggestion that our Student Government and the Big Seven look at the process we employ to determine the size of the SAM fee and the way we allocate it. Specifically, when I tried to discover the rationale behind our current process (which includes the potential for groups to make requests that would exceed 100% of the Discretionary fund) no one could provide the reasons for the way we apportion the fund. My suggestion to the Student Government has been that we ask each of the groups that receive funding to build a budget that is based on their goals and programs for the next year (and include an appropriate amount for the Discretionary Fund Committee to allocate). When a budget is used as a planning tool it affords both a rationale for the size of the fee and a way to assess a group's use of the monies provided. Proper planning also reduces the potential for overspending. For those of you who were not at the Student Government meeting, Doug Anger provided an excellent report that included an evaluation of the loss of purchasing power of the current SAM fee as it has not been increased in at least five years — his analysis did not include the impact of the increases realized for gas and food in the recent months but still demonstrated a loss of between 15% and 17%. If nothing else is done, this is a matter that needs immediate attention. While looking over past SAM allocations and usage, one of the things I found interesting is that in the recent past, the SAM account recorded a substantial rollover (unspent monies) from previous years (a three year average of almost \$71,000 a year). This means that substantial funds collected for student use and activities went unspent in the year they were collected and services and programs that could have been provided were not (obviously this year is the exception to the rule). I don't know whether this occurred because of a lack of planning, or poor leadership, or legislative in-fighting or some other reason. I'm also not aware of any students or student groups that protested this or condemned the Student Government or any of the Big Seven for collecting a fee that then went unused. This, too, is a problem. Some rollover should occur, and having a discretionary account makes all kinds of sense to address new needs and unique program opportunities, but the amount of monies that are rolled over from year to year should not equal forty percent of the monies collected. I'd be happy to speak with any students who continue to have concerns. However, I'd be truly delighted if we can now focus our efforts on solving this matter, developing a more intentional process and working to ensure the success of all of our student groups and our co-curricular and social programming efforts. As the advisor to Student Government I attend most meetings (yes, even those that start at 9:30 P.M.) and would be happy to meet with students before or after the meetings. If you don't catch me there, I'm easily accessible as my office is in the lower level of Cisler Center, room 125. Ken Peress Vice President of Student Affairs