

# History of the ASUO and the Incidental Fee

Data provided by Jill Aho, Senior News Editor of the Oregon Daily Emerald, 2/6/07

Student fees have been around as long as student government.

The first Student Body President was elected in 1899, the same year an optional student body tax was created.

In a time when a six-room house cost \$16 a month for rent and school cost \$10 a term to attend, the \$2.50 incidental fee was massive.

The sum of \$2.50 went to support football, track, publications, the Executive branch of student government and the glee club. 5 percent of all dues collected went to pay the treasurer.

Dues stayed steady until 1907, when they were raised to \$5 and became known as the Associated Students' Tax. They supported the addition of a baseball and debate team.

In 1912, the Associated Students Executive Committee became the Associated Students of the University of Oregon ("ASUO").

The 1920s: Students built Mac Court by selling bonds to the community and taking out loans from banks. According to an ASUO publication, when Mac Court opened in 1926, "The mortgage was publicly burned in the middle of the depression before joyous crowds."

By 1929, the ASUO was running a serious deficit. Varsity football was the only sport supported by the ASUO to bring in any money, and the ASUO's income of \$35,665 was derived from the \$4.50 per term fee. To alleviate its financial burdens, the ASUO took advances on the following year's fees, loans from banks and drew on trust funds. The ASUO was in debt to the tune of \$110,483, not including the outstanding bonds on Mac Court, an additional \$76,000.

The 1930s: In this decade, fees were set by an ASUO Executive Committee. Payment (which remained optional) got students a membership into the ASUO, voting rights, and an Oregon Daily Emerald subscription. Women on campus had their own branch of government, the Associated Women Students.

The 1940s: During World War II, the ASUO elected its first female president, Nancy Ames. Dues were \$12 per year, still optional. Payment of dues included a season ticket to athletic events and a subscription to the Emerald cost an additional 75 cents.

In 1945, the Oregon State Board of Higher Education approved the incidental fee, making the student fee mandatory and under the ultimate control of the state board.

These fees were then set at \$28 per term, and included a gym suit and towel services for mandatory physical education classes. In 1947, the University assumed control of the athletics programs. In 1949, the students built the first part of the EMU.

The 1950s: Student fees remained constant and compulsory. Budgeting of the student fee was controlled

by the University.

**The 1960s:** Student government leaders became more interested in how the incidental fee was spent. Until this time, the ASUO had been mostly under Greek control. In 1963, Neil Goldschmidt, who later went on to become governor of Oregon, became the ASUO President.

During that decade, a student fiscal committee made recommendations to University administration as to how they thought the incidental fee should be spent. The innovative ideas of the 1965 fiscal committee, acting on the power allocated to them by former University President Arthur Flemming, fell on deaf ears when University administrators under the direction of Acting President Ray Hawk failed to execute the new programs proposed by the committee. A letter written by the ASUO Executive stated, "In short, the Senate's right to recommend how the student's money should be used has been rendered meaningless by the President's decision" and the ASUO consulted an attorney.

When new University President Robert Clark arrived to campus, he returned \$27,000 in incidental fees to the student government – funds which were withheld from ASUO while Hawk was president – and an additional \$40,000 in reserves following a re-appropriate request by students. These efforts resulted in an approximately \$1.3 million allocation to ASUO that year.

On Oct. 8, 1969, the ASUO filed suit against the Oregon State Board of Higher Education requesting control of the incidental fee.

**The 1970s:** In 1970, control of the incidental fee was given to universities in the state. In 1971, the State Board asked each university to create guidelines for the establishment of an incidental fee.

The year between 1972 and 1973 saw a great amount of change for ASUO. Under the leadership of William (Bill) Wyatt and Fred Loveys, the student government association took a new form. In 1972, ASUO vowed to fight in order to require the incidental fee of all university students.

In November of 1972, as the 42-member Senate prepared for its general elections, it eased impeachment procedures. One Senator announced they intended to impeach Vice President Loveys. Sen. Mike Bonner is quoted as saying Wyatt and Loveys were incompetent and "haven't accomplished anything since they were elected six months ago." The Senator managed to collect the 800 signatures needed to impeach the duo, but Wyatt and Loveys delayed the impeachment until the scheduled 1973 elections, which ultimately did not shorten their tenure.

In 1973, Wyatt introduced a bill to the Oregon State Senate Education Committee that would give student senators the final say over how the incidental fee was collected and spent.

The \$18 per term incidental fee was now under intense scrutiny. A controversial plan, named the Winkleman plan, proposed to give students a checklist of ASUO programs. Students would be able to choose which programs they wanted to support and with how much of their money. The Constitution Committee ruled the Senate still had control over whether the plan was enacted, but in February a group of students began gathering signatures to abolish the Senate. Worn down by internal disagreement, Student Senator Bob Reno is quoted as calling the Senate "an illusion of power." The ballot measure called for the creation of a five-member Incidental Fee Committee while a new constitution was created. Although turnout that year was less than 1,000 students, 700 voted in favor of abolishing the Senate.

The ballot measure that ended the ASUO Senate and created the temporary IFC, whose only job would be to allocate student fees, also called for the writing of a new constitution prior to elections the following year.

Disagreements between the Executive and the IFC began almost immediately. The ASUO President that year, Greg Leo, sent IFC's \$952,444 budget back to committee. His call for a lower budget was thwarted when additions to the EMU raised the budget to \$975,065.

During the 1973-74 year, the incidental fee was \$20.75. Students resurrected the Winkleman plan and approached the State Board with a proposal to allow each student to choose which activities they would like to support. One State Board member, Loran Stewart is quoted as saying, "Just how representative is student government here? There's a lot of students on campus who evidently don't know who you are."

A 1974 survey indicated students would support "visible programs" like the EMU, the Emerald, OSPIRG and the ESCAPE (Every Student Caring About Personalized Education) program, a program that allowed students to propose experimental classes to be taught by University professors. At the end of the 1973-74 academic year, students were asked to decide between two constitutions, one that kept the IFC and raised the number of members to seven, and one that called for a 30-member Senate. Students also had the option of letting the current constitution expire, which would have caused the ASUO to expire with it, leaving no student government. An Emerald columnist, Greg Wasson wrote, "As demonstrated by the 1972-73 Senate, large groups simply are not capable of making the budget allocations quickly and fairly." Students chose to keep the IFC and create a Student University Affairs Board ("SUAB"), with this new branch of government designed to be a part of the Faculty Senate.

One of Leo's final moves as ASUO president was to create the EMU Board. Students had picketed, protested and boycotted the EMU for purchasing lettuce when the United Farm Workers were on strike.

The incidental fee rose to \$21.95 for the 1974-75 year with an ASUO budget of \$1,020,538.

In November 1974, the State Board approved a proposal to make incidental fees optional. The 1974-75 ASUO President Robert Liberty said, "The decision to set up a traditionally funded program on an optional fee basis will be a decision, in effect, to kill it." Liberty proposed a zero-growth budget that year that included an affirmative action clause when hiring paid staff. Portland State University's IFC placed OSPIRG and the Vanguard newspaper on optional funding. Students protested, and the IFC removed the optional status. The newly formed SUAB was denied a place in the Faculty Senate, so students were encouraged to boycott instructor evaluations.

The 1975-76 ASUO President Jim Bernau said he would veto the IFC's recommendation to give the Child Care and Development Center the \$69,192 the IFC had allotted and instead raise the money through donations. He also vowed to collect for the Emerald as well. His plan failed when fundraising resulted in \$3,000 of the \$40,000 he had proposed. Confusion between the different programs and between branches of government became a constant variable. The incidental fee was announced to be both higher and lower than it ended up, and finally the ASUO announced it would be \$26.31 per term. At the time, it was reported to be the second lowest in the state, with only Oregon State University's \$26 being lower. University administration lowered the incidental fee when going over the ASUO budget, and the fee came to rest at \$25.50 in the summer of 1975. The SUAB also joined the Faculty Senate in 1975.

The ASUO budget in 1976 was \$1,250,000. The EMU took almost half: \$600,000. ASUO programs and government spent \$300,000 and \$200,000 more went to athletics.

**The 1980s:** The ASUO budget increased by more than double from 1979 to 1989. The \$1.5 million budget of 1979 also bought a student health insurance policy and ran 80 programs and 60 services.

The SUAB proposed the current policy of not giving tests or new assignments during Dead Week to the University Senate in 1981. This was also the year the IFC denied funding for the Amazon Community Tenants, a student group that represented the interests of 246 families living in the Amazon housing complex on Patterson Street. The 1981-82 IFC Chairman Karsten Rasmussen is quoted as saying, "Why should incidental fees go to what amounts to a tenants' union?" In the 1990s, the Amazon complex was demolished, amid much protest from residents.

The IFC slashed budgets throughout the 1981-82 budgeting season. The Vice Chairman of the IFC said the student body "cannot be held responsible for costs going up" constantly, referring to increases in postage and wages that littered that year's requests.

Although the Emerald reported that there were 30 slots still open four days before the 1982 ASUO election, the year proved to have the highest voter turn-out in 28 years. The Greek community took over four of the seven seats on the IFC. Students also voted to fund recreation and intramural sports, even though it would increase the incidental fee by \$1.50. Funding was eliminated for this program when the State Board decided to eliminate P.E. requirements. In an unprecedented effort, one student government member placed a question on the ballot that year asking students if they wanted to continue to fund the Emerald. Although no action could have been taken on the outcome of the question, 82 percent of students favored continuing Emerald funding.

The University Senate also began talks in 1982 with the troubled Lane Transit District. A raise in fares had caused ridership to drop off, and it asked the University to subsidize bus passes. LTD offered University students term bus passes for \$36 and asked for a \$4 subsidy. The SUAB thought this was a far better proposal than a parking garage, which would have cost around \$8,000 per space.

The idea of choosing which programs to fund was brought back again in 1982. The ASUO Vice President of Administration and Finance David Gibson opposed the idea. "Last year's IFC at Southern Oregon State voted not to fund their student government," Gibson said. "They got their funding cut from like \$20,000 to \$3,000. We'd be in serious trouble."

Soon after, IFC passed a resolution to reduce or zero-fund programs that "have become so specialized or so restrictive that they no longer serve the needs of, or benefit, the student body." This resolution made way for the IFC to defund groups based on goal statements. As a result, students from many of the groups whose goal statements were denied this year formed a political party to fight Greek control of the ASUO. The party, Students for a Progressive Agenda, successfully took the ASUO Presidency for the 1983-84 year. Mary Hotchikiss was declared the winner with what was an impressive turn-out of 4,000 voters.

Students also voted to fund OSPIRG with \$1, with the stipulation that the budget would be reviewed every two years. The IFC had earlier denied OSPIRG's request to send its entire incidental fee budget to the state office. Despite what amounted to budget cuts for many groups, the IFC still passed a 7 percent increase, raising the incidental fee from \$52 to \$56.

**The 1990s:** By 1992, the incidental fee had climbed to \$106 per term, and the IFC managed a budget of \$4,614,895.

The ASUO President in 1992-93, Bobby Lee, appointed numerous individuals to the IFC that year amid frequent resignations and much controversy. The first controversy was the appointment of former Oregon Commentator editor Ed Carson to the IFC in February 1993. Problems escalated when the IFC attempted to hear the EMU budget over the course of eight days, rather than the traditional two. The EMU representatives viewed the IFC as attempting to micro-manage its budget and complained to the Vice Provost. University President Myles Brand issued an ultimatum to the IFC not to attempt to line-item budget the EMU.

In response to Brand's intervention, the ASUO decided to re-vamp student government. Beginning with the idea of having a target fee, the ASUO said this change would "allow the IFC to start the budget process with an idea of how much each student would have to pay in fees." The ASUO currently refers to this process as "benchmarking."

In April 1993, Lee asked the Constitution Court to disband the IFC for non-fulfillment of duties. The group was failing to make quorum, and the ASUO was under threat from Brand to take away the committee's authority to budget the EMU, which made up half the incidental fee budget. Ten days later the IFC did not approve the Athletic Department's goal statement and issued it a budget cut of \$35,000. The incidental fee had been subsidizing student tickets for many years, and \$22 of the fee had been going directly to athletics.

Less than two weeks later the IFC voted to increase its own stipends.

The ASUO and the Athletics Department negotiated a \$2 fee for student tickets, and the department agreed to reduce its \$1.04 million ASUO funding allocation by \$75,000.

After the 1993 elections, President Lee resigned his position to join the IFC. Two days later three IFC members asked IFC Chairman Steve Masat to resign. A memo sent to the chairman said, "This conflict has been at times self-defeating, as student control of the incidental fee has been placed in jeopardy." The ASUO Constitution Court placed an injunction on the committee's dismissal of Masat, which was lifted a few days later. Masat, not about to give up without a fight, returned to the IFC. The meeting was broken up by public safety. Lee also accused Masat of racism and of threatening Lee with violence.

Also that year, the ASUO Vice President was found to not have been enrolled during a term and required to repay her stipends.

In November 1993, just as the IFC was beginning to prepare for budget season, three committee members announced their resignations, citing financial reasons. An Emerald editorial said, "It is scary to think that the people who manage millions of student dollars can't quite manage their own money." The University moved the EMU's operating budget away from IFC control, which threatened the remaining student oversight of the \$2.2 million incidental fee budget. This was enough to bring students together to rally.

Ultimately, the ASUO worked out a plan to create three sub-committees: one to deal with the Athletic Department, one to look at the EMU and one to deal with ASUO programs. IFC Chairman Jian Liu is

quoted as saying, "It would be good; it would create separate government bodies. It would define exactly what each body can and can't do."

During the 1994 elections, the students voted to disband the IFC, and give budgeting powers to the Student Senate.