

Campus Activities: Who Pays the Bills?

by Joseph S. Fulda

During my undergraduate years at The City College of New York in the late 1970s, I had some interesting experiences with student clubs, and I began to re-examine the whole matter of student activities and the way they are funded.

There seem to be four ills affecting student organizations which, according to friends and subsequent experience, appear to be pervasive on our nation's campuses.

First, the members of some clubs share few interests to draw them together. They do understand, however, that any group of students may organize and register with the student government and the college administration and thus receive a portion of the mandatory student fees collected by the college at the start of each semester. Thus I recall sitting through a two-hour meeting of a campus honor society where the sole topic of discussion was how to dispose of the generous sum we had been allocated. The debate might still be raging had it not been decided to spend it all on a grand party at the home of a student leader.

The second problem with many student organizations is that the leadership has little incentive to adhere to organizational charters. I recall one prayer-and-snack organization with a charter mandating annual elections. Yet several

successive presidents simply appointed the other officers and their successors. When I pointed out to an officer that this was improper, I was asked whether I would prefer the secretariat or the treasury! "Private life," I replied. Of course, nobody really cares enough to take recourse. I didn't. After all, the monies are just there.

Third, club officers frequently divert funds for their own use: pencils, postage, bus fare, meals, maybe a month's rent! Our student newspaper, *The Campus*, was often filled with the latest scandal.

The fourth problem is that mandatory student fees distribute the costs of campus activities with an artificial uniformity. Those who care little about student activities subsidize the average user, while those who are very active are subsidized by the average user. The distribution of benefits is even more artificial. Typically, the student government decides on the apportionment of funds in its own inimitable way. Club officers must beg, cajole, and argue for funds. As I recall quite well, this leaves much to be desired.

Now there is quite a simple solution to all these problems. Why not limit student fees to cover such widely used items as the student center, athletics, and the student media? Maybe a piddling sum could be granted to the student government, too, for its advisory role. The remaining student organizations would be funded

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solely by membership dollars. With the money from student activity fees returned to student pockets, it would be up to the individual whether or not to form, participate in, or pay dues to any club.

Notice how this simple measure addresses all the problems we have sketched. First, clubs whose members share no common bond would quickly dissolve, since their reason for existence—access to mandatory student fees—would be removed.

Second, when the members must pay dues, officers will be held accountable. “Taxation without representation,” unless the officers maintain a consensus, would not be tolerated. If members are sufficiently dissatisfied with their club leaders, or with the way their money

is being spent, they may simply withdraw along with their financial backing.

Third, the cost of campus activities to each student would depend on how much he used them. But because the overhead of the student activities bureaucracy can be eliminated—including student government oversight functions and some college administration supervision—the typical student user would end up paying less in dues than he saved in fees.

Last, the distribution of student funds would be done naturally, not artificially. The most popular clubs would receive the most money. And no clubs would be indebted to the student government or the college administration for their funds. They would answer only to their members. And that is how it should be. □

Readers' Forum

To the Editors:

Professor Russell Shannon's essay, "Tear Down this Wall" in the January 1988 "Freeman" was idealistic and naive. His essay advocates open borders so that illegal aliens can freely enter the United States.

I shouldn't have to write the next paragraph, but I will anyway because I want your readers to know I am not a person who is afraid to see nonwhite immigrants enter this country.

My wife and I sponsored two Vietnamese families 12 years ago. This included bringing them into our home, food, money, clothing, buying them an auto and training them to drive it and finding jobs for them. Most of six months was spent getting these families on their feet. We're glad we did it and today "our" families are doing well and an asset to America.

But "open borders" won't work because of the social welfare system in place in the United States. Not all illegal aliens come to America for liberty and a job.

The United States provides such stunning incentives as free school, free lunch, food stamps, free health care, subsidized housing, unemployment compensation, Aid to Families with Dependent Children and many other freebies. The total package, even for an alien without a job, could well be many times what he could earn at home. And don't believe for a minute that the "invisible hand" of the free market would cause them to move on or go home if they didn't find a job here. Being rational they would recognize that the cost of departing would be too great. It's just too good a deal. That's why 88% of recently arrived refugees (first 31 months) in California are cur-

rently on some kind of county, state or federal welfare.

Cancel the welfare and then we can open the borders. Immigrants will then come to America for liberty and opportunity as they did a hundred years ago.

—William F. Kerschner
Elm Grove, Wisconsin

Professor Shannon replies:

I have no problem at all with Mr. Kerschner's argument that it is *not* desirable for us to have aliens flock here in order to become free loaders on our welfare and social service systems. By all means, let's make such people ineligible for these programs!

In practice, however, this may be difficult or impossible to accomplish. So, as an economist, I must ask: do the *overall* benefits of open immigration outweigh these (and other) costs. Several studies indicate that, indeed, the benefits do predominate. For more details, I recommend again reading the article entitled "What about Immigration?" written by Julian L. Simon which appeared in *The Freeman* for January 1986.

Finally, let me point out that the new immigration law, which now penalizes employers for hiring improperly documented aliens, has the regrettable feature of excluding immigrants who truly want to work. At the very least, we should hasten to tear down this portion of our wall.

—Russell Shannon
Clemson, South Carolina