

SGA Judicial Board operates as organization arbitrator

Ethan Castro

COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE MEMBER

Thus far, coverage of the Illinois Institute of Technology Student Government Association (SGA) has focused on the four main committees of the Senate - Academic Affairs, Communications, Events, and Student Life. As prior articles have exemplified, these four committees serve the needs of the student body by creating projects and assigning senators to carry them out. However, the Senate is only one third of the Student Government Association body. Somewhat less visible than the individual senators, SGA's Finance Board and Judicial Board are both still equally vital parts of the association's operations. Specifically, Judicial Board stands as an intermediary for any potential issues that may arise both between student organizations and Finance Board in terms of funding allocations and between the general student body and SGA as a whole. In addition, the last SGA Senate hearing this past Wednesday affirmed a new amendment to the SGA constitution that will allow Judicial Board, with proper permission, to act as an arbitrator passing final judgment on conflicts within an individual organization.

Working with Finance Board is a vital aspect of any student organization's operations. However, all student organizations have the full right to dispute the allocation decisions made by Finance Board, and Judicial Board functions as a facilitator for these disputes. According to SGA Chief Justice San Dinh, processing appeals of this nature

constitutes "90 percent of our job. After a Student Activity Fund allocation, student organizations have one week to submit their appeals to Judicial Board if they are not satisfied with Finance Board's decision." From here, Judicial Board scrutinizes the source of the student organization's appeal and makes

allocation or lack thereof.

In a similar manner, Judicial Board also processes appeals made by the general student body against the actions of SGA. Chief Justice Dinh explains the process as "when the student body disagrees with a decision made by SGA, they can simply submit a petition to

are liable for petitions to Judicial Board, if plausible reason can be shown for concern.

Finally, the newest amendment to the SGA constitution strengthens the position of Judicial Board by allowing it to serve as an intermediary for issues that may arise within the internal affairs of a singular student organization. One important caveat of this newfound power is that it applies "if, and only if, both sides of the conflicted organization agree to let Judicial Board make the final order" as was clearly stated by Chief Justice Dinh. By no means is SGA seeking to impede upon the autonomy of student organizations. Instead, SGA is merely looking to serve as a neutral and civil option in resolving any issues that may arise within a student organization. By no means are internal student affairs required to go through SGA in the process of their resolution, but the option is now there for those who wish to utilize it.

Student Government Association looks to improve the quality of campus life for all students of the university. However, the very nature of this grand endeavor means that conflicts may emerge. Thus, Judicial Board exists as a nonpartisan entity meant to neutrally and peacefully resolve these issues, whenever they should emerge. All students have a right to make themselves heard and to make their concerns rightfully addressed. To facilitate this standard, students should be aware that appeals to Judicial Board can be made through Hawklink, in addition to being sent over email to sgajboard@iit.edu.



Photos courtesy of SGA

a final decision based on the allocation's compliance with Finance Board guidelines. It should be noted that, as is defined in the SGA constitution and bylaws, Finance Board must comply with whatever decision Judicial Board passes, including completely reversing a given

Judicial Board." Once again, Judicial Board will weigh the students' concern with the existing SGA constitution and bylaws and then dispense a final ruling. Whether it be the approval of a new student organization or the nature of a certain event, all SGA proceedings

Students find answers at SGA-hosted Financial Aid and Student Accounting Town Hall

Erin Nelson

TECHNEWS WRITER

At the first Town Hall meeting of the semester, students approached Financial Aid and Student Accounting with questions that they had about loans, billing, scholarships, and more.

The Department of Financial Aid was asked about multiple topics including the status of the MAP Grant and what the department is doing about it. The Director of Financial Aid, Elizabeth Wahlstrom Helgren, informed the community that they are staying updated on what is happening in Springfield and in student organizations through or outside of Illinois Tech. There has not been a budget meeting this month yet; however, hopes are high for positive results.

The present staff were also asked "If I do not complete the FAFSA paperwork this year, will it affect future years of receiving financial aid?" The Assistant Director, Melissa Hayne Loretto, answered that all aid through Illinois Tech would be unaffected, and that the only loss of financial aid would be federal and state awards of money (and it would not have an impact on future years, either). The financial aid department also addressed the fact that FAFSA was sent out earlier this year and explained that it is so that prospective students can make a more informed decision about their college cost. The new FAFSA also does not require the new year's tax information; it calculates finances with tax information from the previous year. This is an action that was put into place under President Obama and is carried out all over the United States.

Following this, students asked why student loans increase and how that is determined. The response was that the Department of Education has rules that the school follows about when and how they increase. These rules affect Perkins and Stafford loans. Helgren mentioned that the calculated cost of attendance equals tuition, board, room, transportation, fees, and books minus the Expected Family Contribution (EFC), which is the number given to the school from FAFSA based on a student's family's household income. The school then determines the amount of need-based aid that can be given through loans, federal work study, or scholarships. The Department of Financial Aid is continuously researching to increase the amount of money that they can give to students and has a spreadsheet of outside scholarships that can be applied for after being in school. Illinois Tech does not reevaluate merit scholarships after the first year; therefore, any additional scholarships must be from the outside, the Leadership Academy, or receiving a Resident Advisor job. However, there is a special circumstance application, if needed, that students may fill out for additional consideration of financial support. If a student does receive outside scholarships, the information should be given to financial aid as soon as possible so that their merit scholarship amount can be calculated faster. This will help the department be more proactive in making sure Illinois Tech students receive information about their finances faster. The department has also increased publicity about the FAFSA so that Illinois Tech students get the money that they need. In addition, the department is processing loans that they do

receive faster so that the billing statements that students receive are more accurate.

Some additional initiatives that the department of financial aid has taken are expanded counseling hours (testing morning hours), an increase in website communication so additional scholarship help can be offered and student understanding can be improved, making sure a staff member is at the One Stop two days a week, hiring a professional to work the front desk of the office so that students have a better resource when they come to the office, faster email turnaround, and helping students better understand their debt.

Similarly, Student Accounting was asked questions about what the activity and service fees on the bill are. Jackie Anderson, Director of Student Accounting, answered that they are fees that support student organizations, the library, OTS, and the athletics department. It is split up through the Office of the Provost and discussions with the VPs of those services; however, for the most part it is a fairly standard amount that the university receives from year to year. Further confusion about charges can be answered through the One Stop or checking the bill on a student's portal. Tamara Posley, Assistant Director, also clarified that Student Accounting is located at Tech Central on the fourth floor.

Dalvina Lane, the other Assistant Director, then answered a question about payment plans and announced that they become available on November 30 (and that signing up can prevent late fees). Adding or dropping classes automatically recalculates a student's payment plan. Another question was asked about how an employer can pay some of a student's tuition bill if that student works part

time. The employer would need to supply a letter and that would defer the student's tuition payment until they could supply grades to the employer, and a refund would be given to that student if the employer paid after the student had made a payment. This refund and any other refunds would be given through a direct deposit setup, or a cash refund can be given if a form is filled out on the Student Accounting website.

Another question: "How can I set up my account so my parents can pay for my bill?" The answer is to make parents an authorized user on the myIIT portal so that they receive the bill and make payments. FERPA is separate from this, so making sure that the student understands the distinction is important. Student Accounting is working on making sure that billing statements are moving faster so that payments are better understood. They are working also on proactive outreach so that academics are not affected by the financial stressors in the middle of the term.

What many took away from this Town Hall meeting is that administration working with students is the only way to get proper change and communication effectively at Illinois Tech. Career Services and Financial Aid are working together to get students help with understanding their finances, especially in the final six months of college. This means understanding how a student's income can be balanced with all their necessary charges, and formulating a plan of how payment of loans should work. Currently the Department of Financial Aid can help answer these questions, but the goal is to be proactive and get students information about how to control their futures better financially.

Advertise in

TechNews

Contact business@technewsiit.com