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## SGA VIOLATES BYLAWS THROUGH A LACK OF BUDGET OVERSIGHT

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### SGA violates bylaws through a lack of budget oversight



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May 04 13:24 2023

by Ayden Runnels

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**Editor's Note:** Editor-in-chief John Anderson, who was involved in the reporting of this story, is a member of organizations with SGA executives, and visuals editor Maria Crane is a member of SGA. Several members of the *North Texas Daily* editorial board received money from the Raupe Travel Grant to cover expenses related to coverage of SXSW, and were not included in the writing or editing of this story.

The Student Government Association violated several bylaws and constitutional articles throughout the school year by not following laws related to its budget, including a transfer of \$7,200 from the Raupe Travel Grant to their discretionary funds.

Article III of the [SGA constitution](#) requires expenditures over \$400 to be approved by the student senate, and [SGA bylaws](#) require any discretionary spending over \$1000 to be voted on, including "any monies not included in the original Student Service Fee allocation such as money from other departments." Since August 2022, SGA has spent at least \$14,000 without legislation approving its use, almost 39 percent of its spending this year.

"Anything we spent money on was for students, whether it was from food, fire sticks, our events, our programs that we hosted — we hosted more programs, more events than any other administration in the last four years," SGA president Jermaine Turner said. "If we made a mistake, we take full responsibility for that mistake and interpretation."

Since the start of the fall semester, only one piece of legislation has been passed for expenditures, which [approved \\$4,500](#) to use for SGA's end-of-year banquet. Similar expenses — a \$3,887 charge for SGA's annual retreat and

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\$3,515 in food for SGA's career connection event — were not voted on in the Senate. However, they were made aware of expenditures as they occurred.

"We're the senate for the student body, not the senate for sponsorships or the senate for discretionary funds, ironically enough," senator and speaker pro tempore Kaylen Ruiz said. "I mean, we have to approve of those things. The power does go to us at the end of the day. But usually, those are things that the SGA executive board kind of have already written down and kind of agreed upon and talked about beforehand."

SGA members do not make any purchases themselves, nor do they have access to any credit cards or direct funds. Every expenditure is also approved by SGA advisor Christa Coffey and purchased by a non-student employee. Larger handling of funds, including the Raupe transfer, is also approved by Elizabeth With, senior vice president for Student Affairs.

A key factor influencing the executive branch's execution of expenditures was the contention between the bylaws and the constitution. The current administration mostly operated under Article VI of the bylaws, which only requires senate votes for discretionary spending over \$1000, not the constitution's overall \$400 requirement. Article IX of the bylaws states they are "subject to the Student Constitution of UNT in all forms fashions, and interpretations."

Because of the unclear interaction between the two laws, some SGA officials feel the violations reflect the need for changes to be made to the governing documents for more clarity.

"This is an example of the need for the bylaws not only to be updated to reflect what's in the constitution but also just generally," Coffey said.

The constitutional law of \$400 is cited in [several pieces of legislation passed](#) in previous semesters. In Spring 2022, SGA [passed legislation to donate \\$7000](#) to the Eagle's Nest Fund and Raupe Grant after both funds were depleted for the first time in their history. Later in August, \$7,200 was transferred out of the grant without legislation.

The Raupe Travel Grant is a scholarship available to undergraduate students attending conferences and needing assistance with travel fees such as hotels and event registration. The Eagle's Nest Fund allows eligible student organizations to receive funding for events or projects they would like to hold.

In addition to not passing legislation for expenses, SGA has not presented its final expenditures and remaining funds to the senate since 2019, something required in the bylaws. Without the presentations, expenditures for SGA are not made available without specific requests to the executive office. The *Daily* was given access to the [expenditure list](#) for the current administration.

The outlined budget for the 2023 fiscal year was presented at the first SGA meeting of the fall semester in accordance with the bylaws. However, it was not made available publicly to students until the *Daily* requested access to it, after which SGA posted it on their website. Several senate meetings were also unavailable for student access until after the *Daily* requested to view them.

The *Daily* reached out to SGA's Supreme Court for comment and provided SGA's expenditures for review, which led to chief justice Jesse Reyna confirming violations occurred. With the semester ending soon, no action can be taken regarding the violations.

"On its face and based on the facts presented, it appears like a violation did occur," Reyna said. "At this time, the supreme Court has not received an appeal, so no judicial action will be taken, and unfortunately, due to being so close to the end of the semester, we won't be able to schedule a hearing at this time. If an appeal is filed with the court next semester, that administration will be able to judge that appeal on its own merits."

SGA also reached several internal records throughout the year, holding a 100 percent retention rate in the senate for the first time and a 90 percent retention rate in its [First Year Council](#). The 15-member senate also passed over 20 pieces of legislation.

The fall 2023 senate will have [27 senators](#), the most since the COVID-19 pandemic, which Turner attributed to the changes he and vice president Aalyhia Shillow made to SGA's focus.

"It was hard to work sometimes under Devon and David because they were so by the book and they were so policy driven that it was just hard to get anything done, and they weren't doing any work for students," Turner said. "You ask them, well, what have you done for students? And it's like, 'We don't have an answer.' You ask us: increase minimum wage, relocation of the safe sex machine, Safe Sex Week, Mental Health Week, My Life After UNT — we focused on post-secondary graduation. We can name you tangible things that we've done that you can see."

With the Turner/Shillow administration ending, and the new administration headed by Dorcas Bisi and Sarah Robertson beginning in the summer, Shillow advised the new executives to "give yourself grace" because of the difficult nature of the job.

"This is community building, and that's what we put first," Shillow said.

Both Shillow and Turner said that if violations occurred, they were sorry, but the administration should prioritize the interest of students.




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“Never feel bad about making a decision at times that’s going to best help the students,” Turner said. “That is what you have to think about. And I don’t believe in breaking policy, but I believe in helping students, and [that] has to be the number one focus is how can we help students.”

The *Daily* has compiled several individual expenditures throughout the year that were in violation of SGA’s bylaws and/or constitution along with an explanation as to how the funds were implemented.

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| <p><b>RAUPE TRANSFER</b> <span>\$7,200</span></p> <p>On August 3, 2022, \$7,200 was transferred from the Raupe Travel Grant to SGA’s discretionary funding. Months before in the spring, \$3,500 was placed into both the Eagle’s Nest Fund and the Raupe grant through a piece of legislation filed in the senate. The transfer back into SGA’s funds was not approved by senate but was approved by Senior Vice President for Student Affairs Elizabeth With and SGA advisor Christa Coffey. This movement violates Article VI, Section 2D of SGA bylaws, as it is money “not included in the original Student Service Fee allocation” and may represent “money from other departments.” Any money spent with the \$7,200 would not have been originally allocated and as a result would violate the policy.</p> | <p><b>RETREAT PAYMENT</b> <span>\$3,887</span></p> <p>The SGA retreat is an annual event for SGA members, usually held at a camp of some form. In an interview with the <i>Daily</i>, SGA president Jermaine Turner noted their retreat played a significant role in the 100 percent senate retention rate by creating bonds between SGA members. SGA’s fiscal year 2022 budget allocated \$400 to “executive retreats,” meaning any amount for retreats over \$400 would come from discretionary funding. The lack of legislation approving this expenditure violates bylaw Article VI, Section 2D. Because the expenditure is a single item over \$400, it also violates constitutional article III, section 8B.</p> | <p><b>CAREER CONNECTION SPONSORSHIP</b> <span>\$1,500</span></p> <p>On February 9, 2023, The Career Connection event was sponsored by SGA and was held to give students the opportunity to network with career professionals and other students. SGA had already spent \$750 of their allocated \$1,000 sponsorships funds on a previous sponsorship, meaning the remaining \$1,250 cost of the Career Connection would have come from outside of the allocated budget. This would make the expenditure in violation of article VI, section 2B, which covers discretionary expenditures over \$1000, and Article VIII, Section 1D, which notes that any sponsorships over \$1000 must be approved by the senate. SGA president Jermaine Turner said the initial cost was \$800 but was changed shortly before the event, so the executive branch made the decision to approve the expense.</p> | <p><b>BUS TO RETREAT</b> <span>\$1,730</span></p> <p>The cost of the bus to the retreat was over \$400, which makes it in violation of Article III, Section 8B of the SGA constitution. The cost of transportation for the retreat was not more than usual, however in previous years SGA has passed legislation in the senate approving the expenditures.</p> <p><b>FOR MORE INFO</b><br/>For the full 2022-2023 SGA expenditure list, scan the QR code below.</p>  |
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Graphic by Ayden Runnels

Featured Image The door to the SGA office is propped open on April 25, 2023. Matt Iaia

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