

DEFICITS

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of their money from student fees, which the IFC distributes. Each year, the IFC approves annual budgets, allocating specific amounts to be spent on line items such as speaker fees, events, telephone charges and payroll.

The ASUO comptrollers approve charges to each group's account based on the IFC budget. Upon approval, the EMU accounting office issues the checks.

An officer of a student group can be paid by stipend, a fixed monthly amount, or through work study at a subsidized hourly rate.

Regardless of how or how much each individual is paid, a group is only allowed to spend the amount allocated by the IFC for payroll.

Work study presents a particular problem, not only for the comptrollers, but for the groups themselves.

"With stipends," Naber said, "the comptrollers can usually project when a group will run out of money. Work study you can't project. You have no idea how many hours they're going to work."

For example, a work study student could work 10 hours per week for a month and then work 50 hours one week, sending the payroll budget into deficit.

"We can't catch it before that because there's no control," Naber said. "We only find out after the fact."

In addition, a student can only earn as much work study as financial aid will allow. When someone goes over his allotted work study budget, it costs the student group 70 percent more per hour because that person's wage is no longer subsidized, Naber said.

Amazon Child Care Director Susan Blanchard said five work study students unknowingly exhausted their work study budgets last year and continued to work, which cost the program more than anticipated.

"It's always been a problem," Blanchard said, "but this is astronomical."

"This is the first year (the program has run a payroll deficit), and it's not something we want to repeat. We've developed a whole system to avoid

what happened last year."

Another accounting problem leading to payroll deficits is overpayment.

When a student group hires someone, that group's director submits an employment card to the comptrollers. The hire card states whether a person will be paid by stipend or work study and the rate of pay.

The groups decide how much to pay their employees, and they may change their rate of pay at will, Naber said.

"Even if we think someone is overpaid, as long as (a group) doesn't go over their total budget, technically there's nothing we can do about it," Naber said. "The IFC and the ASUO haven't given us the power to enforce particular amounts."

Blanchard said two of her Amazon stipend employees continued to be paid for three months after she informed the comptrollers that they were no longer working for Amazon. The former employees are currently negotiating with accounting to return the money.

In cases of obvious payroll error, such as an individual receiving too much, the recipient is supposed to return the money; however, Naber doubts that happens very often.

If the comptrollers are up to date on their records, they will usually catch a payroll deficit or overpayment or both — particularly those related to stipend employees — within one month. Naber is working on a computer program that will help the comptrollers stay on top of payroll.

However, before Naber became head comptroller, the books were not balanced or kept up to date on a regular basis, and the rules regarding budget deficits weren't strictly enforced.

"I came here in February," Naber said, "and the books hadn't been done since August."

The comptrollers have the power to freeze a group's entire budget if the group runs a deficit. However, Naber said they hadn't exercised that power until this year, partly because the comptrollers were so far behind in their books they didn't know when a group went into deficit.

Until now, student groups haven't been made accountable for budgeting errors. They don't

have to pay the money back, and the majority don't.

Amazon Child Care went to the IFC in June and asked for extra money to cover its deficit. However, IFC told it to "put it on hold and come back" during budget season, Blanchard said.

In addition to the comptroller's power to freeze an overdrawn budget, the IFC recently decided that groups with deficits will be subject to 10 percent budget cuts the following year. The new rule goes into effect with the 1992-93 budgets, which are currently being heard by the IFC.

The deficits don't carry over because of a belief that a group shouldn't be held responsible for the fiscal mismanagement of previous officers, Naber said.

"If we can just keep payroll under control, we should be relatively deficit-free by the end of the year," Naber said.



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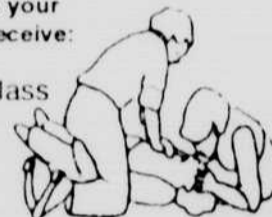


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