

Retreats: Student government uses student funds for coast, Sunriver trips

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"form a cohesive vision," through a variety of workshops, including campaign planning, working with interns and studying the history of the student fee, to name a few.

Others question the necessity of spending money to hold retreats on the coast and in central Oregon.

"I didn't realize why it was at the beach, because we never got to go out on the beach," said Taraneh Foster, who was ASUO public relations director during the 2003-04 school year. "It was a long drive for not being able to see anything."

Student Senator Jack Crocifisso said it is probably unnecessary for student leaders to travel so far.

"If there were better facilities closer by, it would be more cost-effective," Crocifisso said.

Former ASUO Campus Outreach Coordinator Shannon Tarvin — who said she quit ASUO over personal disagreements, but still participates in ASUO projects — said it isn't necessary to go to the beach to have a retreat, adding that it wastes money. She said the further the retreat is from campus, the less focused on business people are apt to be. Tarvin said one of the most beneficial retreats she went on last year was on campus.

But Petkun said it is necessary to get away from campus.

"This is a retreat. We are retreating," he said. "Otherwise it's impossible for people to dedicate a weekend and break away from other things they're working on."

Petkun said going to the beach or Sunriver allows bonding to occur between staff members.

"Really what facilitates the bonding is being separated," Petkun said. "We are sleeping in the same house together overnight, instead of having

people go their separate ways after each workshop."

ASUO Public Relations Coordinator Nathan Strauss agreed, saying it is the only time the staff can work together on strategies and missions, allowing them to have an effective year.

ASUO Student Senator Kevin Day said retreats allow him to avoid distraction and focus on the ASUO.

Student government leaders disagreed on whether the trips — paid in large part with money from all students — benefit all students.

Tarvin said she didn't think the retreats during the 2003-04 school year were beneficial to all University students.

"There was an emphasis on once we got part of our work done, we could go play," she said, adding that the retreat was not a good use of student money.

Former ASUO Environmental Coordinator Kyle Allred said going on retreats was a valuable experience.

"It's nice to go someplace pretty," Allred said.

But, Allred said, the retreats don't directly benefit all students. Instead, they indirectly benefit everyone because they help the student government do a better job.

Petkun and Strauss said the retreats do benefit all students.

"The incidental fee is for the cultural and physical development of students," Strauss said. "A retreat is ensuring that the Executive, which is based on student fees, has an effective year and gets things done and works for students and be effective."

Petkun said staff members also watch movies, play cards and go out on the beach on the retreats, but the retreats are important because they help "squash" the animosity that has existed in past offices and help the staff members trust each other.

"It's important to make sure we're

all on the same page," Petkun said. "If the ASUO can't work as a team or know what it's doing, no work is going to get done throughout the year."

"This is an intense place, and especially with a bunch of young people together it's important to make sure people are aware of what's acceptable and what's unacceptable," Petkun said.

Day said the ASUO finance retreat, a retreat for about 50 students — including student senators, Programs Finance Committee members, EMU Board members, controllers and marketing staff members — was very beneficial. On the Sunriver retreat, participants went over procedures and Day said he learned everything necessary to do his job.

"Students who go, learn," he said. "It helps them do a better job and help all students when they return."

The ASUO is not alone among student governments in taking retreats. The retreats for members of ASOSU, Oregon State University's student government, are very similar to those here, said Dan McCarthy, ASOSU vice president.

McCarthy said ASOSU usually takes two to three retreats a year. McCarthy said they spent around \$3,000 on their retreat to Sunriver. He said the other two retreats are day retreats and cost about \$300 each. He said the ASOSU trip is filled with workshops and exercises.

"We work our asses off," McCarthy said, adding that leaving campus allows his staff to concentrate on working. "It's the one time where our organization can be in the same place with unity."

Reaction from students on this campus was mixed.

University graduate student Kayla Brinkman said she thinks sometimes organizations need to go on a retreat.

"I'm comfortable with the money

being spent, knowing that there's progress being made toward the goals of the organization," she said.

University senior Jose Bernal said he doesn't think the retreats are a bad thing.

"If I worked in ASUO, I'd want my perks," he said, adding that although not all students may benefit from the retreats, it's good that some are.

"It's a blatant misuse of student funds," University senior Jared

Mason-Gere said.

But Petkun insists the retreats are crucial to the success of ASUO and improve its ability to help all students.

"This is an enormous responsibility that we're honored to take on," he said. "It's really important that people have the background to make sure people do it responsibly and wisely."

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