



**THE**

The Commonwealth's Conservative and Investigative Newspaper  
(First copy, free; each additional copy, \$3.00)

# MINUTEMAN



2009, Number 2

March/April, 2009

Veritas Vincit

## “Student Bridges” Spends Your Money *Responsibly...*



# APRIL FOOLS!

- \$10k on swanky dining
- \$10k on hotels & cars
- \$2k on party supplies

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# Agency's Reckless Spending Builds 'Bridges' to Fiscal Delinquency

Alana Goodman, Brad DeFlumeri, and John Beale - *Minuteman Staff*

As student fees climb even higher, The Minuteman has learned that Student Bridges – a UMass agency whose \$172,000 budget is allocated by the Student Government Association from the mandatory annual student activity fee paid by every undergraduate -- spent a significant portion of its budget on lavish dinners, wild parties and local hotel rooms.

Student Bridges claims to be a college preparatory pathway and tutoring program for low-income and minority children, but according to financial expenditure logs obtained under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) by The Minuteman, the organization spent thousands on frivolities, such as \$10K worth of food during the 2008 Fiscal Year alone-- including one shocking \$2,100 tab racked up during a single night of revelry at Salsarengue Restaurant and Seafood in Holyoke.

In addition to food, Student Bridges blew an outrageous \$7,954 on rental cars, \$1,850 on hotels, \$2,840 on bus transportation, and \$1,918 on party supplies, t-shirts, and personalized promotional items.

The group operates under the guise of a community service organization, but their members are far from volunteers. Instead, Student Bridges is made up of paid student "interns" hired at the discretion of Undergraduate Programmatic Coordinator and out-going SGA Commuter Area Governor Vanessa Snow. Some of these interns are paid up to \$10 an hour – which added up to an exorbitant \$33,400 in student activity fee money last year alone.

In addition, Student Bridges "interns" are eligible to receive four UMass undergraduate honors credits in exchange for "engaging with the community" once or twice a week.

As is widely known, a large contingent of paid SGA Executive Branch officers and cabinet-level officials maintain close ties to either the Senate's ALANA Caucus or the Student Bridges program. Prominent in this group are outgoing-SGA President Malcolm Chu, Student Bridges Undergraduate Coordinator and SGA Senator Vanessa Snow, Graduate Coordinator Mishy Leiblum, and board member Shane Coleman. Additionally, Orchard Hill Senator Ben Thompson, who agreed to meet with the Minuteman to discuss this article only in the presence of "private legal counsel," also serves on the Student Bridges board, and, as an SGA Senator, helps determine its colossal annual funding level.

More specifically, this past year while numerous financially strapped registered student organizations (RSOs) struggled to even operate with an average annual budget of less than \$5,000 -- and 21 of these RSOs saw their budgets slashed – Student Bridges enjoyed a \$50,000 increase in their student activity fee allocation, despite the fact that they were unable to quantify any statistically measurable accomplishments, such as the number of students it mentors and those who attend college or even finish high school, to the SGA.

Although the stated mission of Student Bridges is to "increase college access and success for underrepresented students," thus far, the group has presented no data to document its purported successes or indicate that, through its efforts, even



Student Bridges members demonstrating how to study for SATs? Image Source: Student Bridges' Facebook Pictures (Public Domain).

one student has been accepted into college -- let alone UMass Amherst.

"As of right now [the success of Student Bridges] would be very difficult to quantify because a lot of the work they're doing is with middle school students," said Shaun Robinson, the Speaker of the SGA.

Further disenfranchising to other university-funded student groups is the fact that Student Bridges has only been in independent operation since 2006, yet has the largest budget of any student group on campus. Traditionally, student group funding has been based on proven longevity and activity; for Student Bridges, funding appears to be based on having friends in the SGA -- including out-going President Malcolm Chu, who sits on the Student Bridges advisory board, and the aforementioned Thompson, the student senator.

The only fee-funded group on campus with a larger budget than Student Bridges is the Student Legal Services office -- and they pay a team of board-certified attorneys whose services are available to all fee-paying students on campus, not a select group of Holyoke middle school students with no connection to the university and which yield no enhancement to student life at UMass.

The need for an outreach organization like Student Bridges has also raised questions. A group strikingly similar to Student Bridges called the Skills, Training, and Enrichment Program (STEP) is already in place in Holyoke middle schools. The public program, which is funded by the city, touts itself as "an academic support program for students from the seventh and eighth grades in Holyoke," making Student Bridges seem superfluous. Students on campus agree. "That's outrageous and redundant," said Prateek Katti, a Freshman Chemical Engineering major. "I don't want my fee money funding such a program."

As noted earlier, after several requests for comment, Student Bridges spokesman and SGA Senator Ben Thompson agreed to discuss the agency's finances only with private legal counsel present. Given the SGA's illustrious and successful recent history of combating dissent and opposition with intimidation

tactics, we respectfully declined.

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## The Amount of Money that Student Bridges Spent on FOOD ALONE Would Fund the Entire 2009 Budget of ALL of these RSOs COMBINED:

1. Field Hockey Club
2. Women's Lacrosse Club
3. Society of Women Engineers
4. Pre-Vet/Animal Science Club
5. Student Alliance for Israel
6. InterVarsity Christian Fellowship
7. Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Club
8. VOX (Pro-Choice Club)
9. Wildlife Society
10. National Society of Black Engineers
11. Bicycle Racing Team
12. SPIRALS (Student Pagan Club)
13. History Club
14. VASMA (Veterans' Association)
15. Taiwanese Student Association
16. Short Cuts (Student Literary Journal)
17. SHARE (Students Helping Area Reach-out Efforts)
18. Tennis Club

## 'STUDENT BRIDGES', Our Jackass of the Month

- The only thing more horrifically large than their bloated 172K FY2009 budget is the bloated backside of their responsibility-averse Director, Vanessa Snow.
- The only thing more wasteful than the careless way they manage their budget were the amount of uneaten tacos and burritos they left at Taco Bell.
- They spent more money on food, drinks, hotels, and rental cars in Fiscal Year 2008 than Eliot Spitzer spent on high-class hookers. (Well, almost)
- They failed to show any tangible quantitative achievements in their program during Fiscal Year 2008, yet had the arrogant audacity to request a \$50,000 larger budget when most student groups' overall budget allocations are less than \$5,000.
- They, in essence, take your Student Activities Fee money to discriminatorily tutor poor minority students without showing any tangible results.
- Under the guise of "building bridges to education opportunities" and acting as a "community service organization," the only servicing this group of corrupt bureaucrats-in-training does is at the salad bar at Salsarengue, where it spent a preposterously indefensible \$5000 in Fiscal Year 2008, thus literally making Director Snow's ass its own (rather large) budgetary line item for Fiscal Year 2009
- Given all the time this clumsy group of freeloading Leftists spends at restaurants in Holyoke, it is no wonder that their obesity rate is higher than their mentored students' high school graduation rate

...'Student Bridges', *The Minuteman's* Jackass of the Month

