

# 2015 USSA National Student Congress Report

## *Context*

### **AS Legislative Affairs Council June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015 Meeting Minutes**

#### **VII. Action Items**

##### **A USSA Congress Funding Request**

Kohout said these are some estimates for how much congress will cost. They're hoping to send eight people. Some of the money will come from next year's LAF, she's hoping this year's LAC will decide to fund \$2,500 to USSA Congress.

*MO TION LA C-15-S-14 by Goldblatt*

Fund \$2,500 for USSA Congress

Second: DeAlmeida      Vote: 10-0-0      Action: Passed

##### **B. United States Students Association Applications**

The LAC goes into executive session. Kohout said the delegation is Marya Draw, Elva Nitereka, Abby Ramos, Belina Seare, Andrea Tompkins, Alia Taqieddin, Jaleesa Smiley [withdrew] and Losa Berhane [Patricia Pacheco attends as first alternate],

*MOTTO LAC-15-S-15 by Goldblatt*

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Approve the delegation for USSA Congress.

Second: DeAlmeida Vote: 9-0-1 Action: Passed

#### **MOTIONS**

**LAC-15-S-** Fund \$2,500 for USSA Congress

**14**

**LAC-15-S-** Approve the delegation for USSA Congress

**15**

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### **AS Personnel Committee July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015 meeting**

In order to send the AS Legislative Liaison, Josie Ellison (also serving as WSA Vice President for Federal Affairs), and the AS REP Organizing and Outreach Coordinator, Rachael Belisle, to the 2015 USSA NSC, funding was requested and granted from the AS Student Development Fund (FXXSDV). This funding covered their registrations (\$530), as well as the majority of their lodging (\$600) and flight costs (\$600). Their meals/incidentals were covered by the Legislative Action Fund.

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### ***FXLA CF Expenses***

<i>Travel</i>	
Flights	\$2,515.00
Private Auto Reimbursement	\$59.80
SeaTac Parking	\$71.76
Total	\$2646.56

<i>Lodging</i>	
2 Double Queen bedrooms	\$1,846.69

<i>Stipends (meals and incidentals)</i>	
10 X \$180 stipends	\$1,800.00

<i>Registrations</i>	
8 X \$265 registrations	\$2,120.00

Total: \$8,413.25

### ***FXXSDV Expenses***

<i>Travel</i>	
Flights	\$600.00

<i>Lodging</i>	
1 Double Queen Bedroom	\$600.00

<i>Registration</i>	
2 registrations	\$530.00

Total: \$1,730.00

**Total Expenses:** \$10,143.25

### ***Delegation Reflections***

Reflection Questions:

1. What did you learn at USSA Congress and how will you apply it to your work on campus?

Abby: The biggest thing I learned during the conference was the strength of direct action. While at the conference I went to a workshop titled “Mean girls” where we discussed the process of where to start when you want to get something accomplished on your campus. This workshop really opened my eyes to seeing how important and how much direct action can have an impact. With this new knowledge I plan on implementing it in my work with my position on the BoD, especially around the ESC and the new renovation.

Marya: I learned one main thing: that there is a time for personal development as an activist, and a time to put personal feelings aside in order to be able to get real work done without interruption. It’s very important to hone individual perspectives because that can be useful in the group setting in working towards a campaign. However, doing both in the same context is stressful and difficult. This alternation of super deep introspection in caucus spaces and then into larger groups was hard to reconcile. Having NSC set up like that made me realize that at WWU I’d like to have spaces pre-campaign planning that had to do with discussion on perspectives, feelings and opinions, **before** working on the actual physical things we want to tackle. Coming into a space for work knowing that the touchy stuff is already unpacked will make it easier to be productive.

Elva: I learned that movement building is driven by the work of students who continue to act even when the immediate space of organizing has dissipated. A lot of the campaigns in USSA stemmed from ideas or movements which were carried from the previous years. I saw this as an opportunity from students from previous years to continue sharing knowledge, and at the forefront of influencing the incoming generations. The only issue I saw was active members who organized campaigns without being transparent with the entire USSA Community.

Losa: I learned that relationship building is necessary prior to planning actions and delving into strategizing. The group dynamic will be more authentic and ultimately more work can be done in terms of organizing actions and fulfilling collective goals if we can understand each other in order to build with one another and other coalitions.

Andrea: I think the main thing I learned at Congress was how political organizing within systems/ institutions that is driven by students works. Having very little organizing experience with Western, I was not sure what to expect as tangible tools to do successful campus organizing was not something I necessarily had knowledge or access to prior to congress. Understanding how to start, support and accomplish an actual campaign was very beneficial, as I have been involved with State of Emergency since last year but did not fully understand how it had all come together.

Alia: I learned that an active and engaged student body is integral to any form of community building or organizing on campus. After observing how the USSA campus affiliates that organize at a high capacity strategized around their campaigns’ accessibility for students-at-large, I have been reflecting on how effective the AS/ student organizers are at making opportunities for engagement accessible to the general WWU population.

## 2. What ideas do you have moving forward?

Abby: The idea I have moving forward is to work with students around the ESC and the renovation to fight for what students actually want, which is a physical building. So with some of the skills I learned in the conference I plan to use those to the best of my ability to get the ESC an actual building with the help of other students.

Marya: Mostly I realized that we need numbers and dedication to be successful. When considering how to apply USSA campaigns at WWU I often thought “that would be hard to do on our campus” but that was mostly because passionate people are spread apart in different groups. If we can concentrate on shared interests and band together, it wouldn’t be so hard to take big actions. I definitely want to coordinate collaboration between the core group of student leaders on campus with club leaders and students at large to make this possible.

Elva: Moving forward I would like to build more awareness of student movements across campus. I am currently working in the Women’s Center, and trying to bridge between food sovereignty organizers in the university, and the activist in the Bellingham community. I am currently in communication with various environmental organization, and hope to build more student and community power in the discussion/ process of sustainability.

Losa: I would like to continue the work of the State of Emergency campaign on our campus and really make it a sustaining and engaging campaign for Black and Brown students to feel like they have something that will be altered and catered to the needs of those students on this campus. I’d like to continue the focus on campus diversity but also build with the community when incorporating the legislation (two bills) and prison divestment into the campaign.

Andrea: Moving forward I would love to get more students involved, specifically students of color, first generation, low income students that do not necessarily have access to USSA in the ways that I have. As for working on campaigns, continuing my work with State of Emergency would be wonderful, especially since last year was more of informing folks about what this campaign was, hopefully we can take more action within the campaign. Personally I would love to do more work surrounding Prison Divestment. Western, through Aramark is a huge supporter of the Prison Industrial Complex, which could potentially be addressed within the State of Emergency Campaign I am already working on.

Alia: Moving forward, I hope to be supportive in my role within the AS, and as a student affected by harmful policies, in making USSA campaigns accessible and successful on campus.

**3. What are some of the strengths and weaknesses of USSA? How do you think WWU could best utilize direct membership with USSA in the upcoming year?**

Abby: As a first timer at this conference I found that USSA was extremely overwhelming with the information and was not easily understandable for someone who is new to the space. It also felt hostile to ask questions and did not feel safe to ask questions. The space was also dominated by California schools and the conference revolved around that most of the time. It also felt really odd to be put in a position to make a vote on an organization that I had never been involved with. I did feel some of the ways of procedure were interesting and found ways to implement them in the AS (i.e. AS fall staff development and vibe-checkers). I also enjoyed the caucus spaces, however a majority of the time we talked about what needed to be voted on and I didn't feel like we really got to build a community.

Marya: As I touched on earlier, USSA's emphasis on personal development is way too mixed in with a space for concrete planning. We had a presentation from a representative of Canada's equivalent org, and they have accomplished a TON without spending as much time in caucus spaces discussing on a personal level. Those closed spaces were easily my favorite part of the conference, but I wish they could have happened at the beginning and end instead of throughout maybe. Or maybe the spaces could have been more oriented toward specific aspects of what USSA wants to accomplish.. It was just really emotionally and psychologically taxing to go back and forth between an impersonal workshop and having heart to hearts. It really didn't make sense to me how we were supposed to bounce back and forth and be productive in both.

Elva: I foresee nothing as perfect or as an immediate solution for problems. Keeping this in mind I am also interested in investing my energy in spaces that are more intentional. I would like to add a disclaimer that my thoughts are directed at organizational process not individual people. Keeping this in mind I would like to touch a little the act of harm, which was heavily perpetuated in this conference in Vegas. It is real and it is pervasive within this organization's structure, the organizations has not made many strides to radically change or address inaccessibility of attending the conferences. There is a lack of support for students of color attending Historically Black Universities, community colleges, or schools that have not been accredited. This left conferences attendees coming from highly privileged backgrounds or universities, which historically excluded students of color in the process of policy making.

A strength I see are some individuals and participating caucus spaces which are reimagining what it means to be and act as a community. I am a member of the People Of African Descent Caucus (PO AD) space, which is by far one of the most radical spaces I have ever been in, where people act in love, and the energy of resilience and trauma which carries us. I genuinely love all of PO AD, they were not only my friends at the conference they were my family.

Losa: USSA as an organization has a lot of evolving and restructuring necessary to become a truly accessible and safer space for all students. I am hopeful and willing to put my energy into that foreseeing change due to the revolutionary people in the leadership of USSA and the power and healing and derives from the relationships created with other students at these conferences.

I found building with other students across the nation truly a privilege that I was able to access as a current board member and member of PO AD (People Of African Descent). However the organization needs to make accessibility a priority to marginalized students, plenary is something that needs to be completely restructured as its origins and oppressive and exclusionary to those who are often underrepresented.

Andrea: I will start with the strengths that I encountered within USSA at congress first. I think that having a space for students to take part in political student run organizations is an opportunity many students specifically underrepresented students do not necessarily have access too is something astounding. Some of the student organizers that I have met through USSA, have been able to show me that there can be a critical and use their access to USSA to strengthen their work outside of USSA. As for some of the weaknesses I encountered... The lack of intentional inclusion was by far the biggest weakness that spread all throughout this organization. At congress people were continuously mis-gendered. Accessibility to students not familiar with political student organization or USSA were left in the dark about many things (speaking from my own experience). The strongest strength about USSA I encountered was by far People of African Descent (PO AD), not only did the people within that space make time for unity and support, it was a very critical and intentionally space that I felt safe in. As POAD peoples we could really bring our lived experiences with institutions, organizing, School, etc into that space and be validated and supported, while also being pushed to think of ways we can collectively dismantle the continued oppression in certain spaces.