Executive Summary

To: Ashleigh Moyer
CC: Dr. J. Patrick Biddix
From: Mary Beth Burlison, Jared Grimsley, and Adam O'Dell
Re: Opting In and Out of Student-Organized Programming

In the spring of 2014, both the Tennessee House of Representatives and Senate passed the Senate Joint Resolution 0626 (2014), "a resolution to direct the University of Tennessee Board of Trustees to implement changes to the assessment and allocation of the student activity fees within the University of Tennessee System". In order to comply with the letter and SJR 0626, Chancellor Jimmy G. Cheek appointed Vice Chancellor for Student Life Vincent Carilli to chair The Student Fee Task Force. Beginning fall semester 2014, students at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville were asked, "to specifically authorize the allocation of this portion of the fee to Student-Organized Programming".

Valuing student development and engagement, the Center for Student Engagement (CSE) is guided by its mission, which is, "to contribute to the holistic education of all students by providing programs and leadership opportunities that advance student learning" (CSE Mission, 2014). Keeping the mission in mind, the allocated portion of the Student Programs and Services Fee reduced the amount of funds used towards Student-Organized Programming. This loss lowers the funds used to provide various programs and leadership opportunities as well as decreasing student interest from those who opted-out or did not make a decision.

The purpose of this study was to assess the opt-in/opt-out process; specifically, the study focused on the students who opted-out and why. CSE sought to understand the reasons students chose to opt-out in order to better educate students on the decision they made (i.e. not authorizing the University of Tennessee to allocate their respective fee to student-organized programming). While the focus is on those students whom opted out, the electronic survey used was distributed to both students who opted in and out, to gain feedback from perspectives.

Using CampusLabs, the assessment team—comprised of three master's level graduate students enrolled in the College Student Personnel program—began to assess the demographics and authorization choice of the 530 survey respondents. In order to understand the choices students made, the assessment team divided the findings into three synthesized sections: opt-in, opt-out, and survey clarification. The following table compares the highest demographic frequencies from those students who indicated they opted in and out.

	Opt-In	**Opt-Out**
Age	20 years old (19.35%)	21 years old (16.53%)
Gender	Female (64.27%)	Male (48.46%)
Race/Ethnicity	White or Caucasian (80.53%)	White or Caucasian (71.54%)
Class Level	Freshman/Junior/Senior (19.73%)	Senior (28.46%)
Status	Full-time Undergraduate (72%)	Full-time Undergraduate (63.85%)
Academic College/ UT Affiliation	College of Arts & Sciences (39.73%)	College of Arts & Sciences (29.23%)
Student Involvement	Yes (69.60%)	Yes (51.54%)
Transfer Student	No (84%)	No (70.77%)

Opt-In

Seventy two percent of the survey respondents chose to allocate their portion of the Student Programs and Services Fees to Student-Organized Programming or "opt-in". Overall, the students who chose to opt-in indicated they made their selection based on personal opinions. Given the option to provide additional information regarding their selection, five themes, organized below by prominence, emerged from students who indicated they opted-in.

Major Themes	Comments
Importance of student programming	Respondents felt student programming was an important component to the University. They believe student programming is informative, provides exposure to diversity, builds a sense of community, and creates leadership positions for students on campus. Several indicated student programming as an integral part of the University and student life.
"Sex Week"	Although some of the respondents disagreed with "Sex Week" they chose to opt-in because they believed student programming to be valuable to a students collegiate experience. Other comments mentioning "Sex Week" were related to education. Some of the respondents referred to "Sex Week" as informative programming, while one student specifically stated "Sex Week" should take place in order to educate students on "rape, sexual assault, and affirmative consent".
"Another use that benefits students"	Respondents indicated their decision to opt-in was due to the fact they were unaware of where their portion of the fee would go if they chose to opt-out.
Still paid fees	Most of the respondents understood they would have to pay the fee regardless; therefore their decision to opt-in was made so the fees could be used for students by the students.
Cheaper in the long run	Students indicated reason for opting-in was due to the fact they did not want to pay more for an event if they elected to opt-out. Many stated they wanted cheaper ticket costs for events.

Many students expressed strong feelings in support of Student-Organized Programming:

"Beyond the college campus, fee-funded student organizations and programs provide opportunities for students to take leadership roles and learn communication, organization, and team building skills valuable to greater society." –Anonymous Opt-In Survey Respondent

"Student programming is incredibly important for the development of our campus population. Those who opted out are truly MISSING out on the great opportunities we're given on a weekly basis." –Anonymous Opt-In Survey Respondent

"I have benefitted from numerous events funded by my campus fee and I think that my college experience would have been lacking without these opportunities."
–Anonymous Opt-In Survey Respondent

Opt-Out

Twenty five percent of the survey respondents chose not to allocate their portion of the Student Programs and Services Fees to Student-Organized Programming or "opt-out". Overall, the students who chose to opt-out indicated they made their selection based on personal opinions. Given the option to provide additional information regarding their selection, six themes, organized below by prominence, emerged from students who indicated they opted-out.

Major Themes	Comments
Personal beliefs	Aside from specifically mentioning "Sex Week", numerous students cited their personal beliefs against objectionable programming as the main reason behind their decision to opt-out.
Lack of involvement and participation	Several students indicated not being involved and a lack of personal participation in campus events as they reason behind them opting out. Many students (undergraduate and graduate) said they weren't on campus enough to necessitate paying for events they would never get to go to.
"Sex Week"	Many respondents were very upfront that they opted-out because they didn't support "Sex Week".
Dislike of the "all-or-nothing" approach	Many respondents didn't like that they couldn't just opt-in for specific programming, but because there was some programming that they were against, they made the decision to opt-out of it all.
Not enough information	Many respondents noted they did not know enough to make an informed decision. The verbiage was said to be vague and not communicating enough about what the options actually mean.
Financial reasons	A major theme revolved around students already spending enough money on their education, and wanted to use that $20 elsewhere (even though they didn't know they still had to pay the money). Some thought they would be paying an EXTRA $20. Others blatantly thought it was a waste of money.

Many students expressed strong feelings in opposition of having their fees allocated to support Student-Organized Programming:

"I looked through the list detailing previous uses for the money and there were several I felt uncomfortable supporting. That said, the "all-or-nothing" manner of the decision is disappointing. I was fine with the grand majority of the list and even would have actively asked for my money to go towards some of them, but the inclusion of a few certain events made it impossible for me to financially back the ones I did support."
–Anonymous Opt-Out Survey Respondent

"I have no desire to pay for sex week or any of the "Student-Organized Programming" that I have never attended and have no intention to. It is my hopes that by opting out, my money will go to a better cause, such as funding the education that I'm actually there to receive and providing conveniences to the campus like busing and better parking. I'm doubtful that will happen, but its better than nothing." –Anonymous Opt-Out Survey Respondent

Clarification

      Surveyed students were asked what could be done to make the result of the decision to 'opt-in" or "opt-out" more clear. Given the option to provide additional information regarding their option, six themes emerged and are organized below by prominence.

Major Themes	Comments
Clarification of decision to "opt-in" or "opt-out"	Respondents wanted greater clarification of the events funded. Many indicated they felt student programming to be important but did not feel there was enough information linking the decision to opt-in to student programming other than Sex Week.
Transparency of fee allocation	Respondents indicated a desire to know what programs were being funded and the amount of funding that was allocated toward each program, with suggestions that a detailed annual report of programming and funding being made available to all students would be helpful. Many respondents felt it was important for the university to also indicate where the opt-out money was going.
"Sex Week"	Some respondents believe the opt-in/opt-out policy was associated with "Sex Week" and did not emphasize other programs. It should be clarified that the fee funds many other programs.
Opt-out does not save money	Many respondents indicated it was not made clear that the decision to opt-out would not result in a refund of fee money or the ability to pay less in fees. Inversely, several respondents felt that it was not clear that the decision to opt-in did not mean that they would pay an additional fee to participate in student programming.
Who needs additional information	Several respondents indicated incoming first-year students and transfer students as two populations that need additional information on the dynamics of student programming. It was suggested that the university direct resources specifically to these population.
Means of sharing of information	Several respondents felt that email was not adequate for reaching all students. Suggestions included the use of social media, visual posters, and videos to explain the option. Respondents suggested that condensing the information, using less-technical wording, and sending frequent reminders may increase the effectiveness of emails.

      Respondents provided notable feedback on how to clarify this message.

"I thought that I was going to pay additional 19 dollars to Opt-In but after reading this survey I came to know that I don't have to pay additional money, instead I am already paying it and the money is going to be used from it." -Anonymous Survey Respondent

"Invest in more advertising about all the fantastic student programs. A few people were fixated on only the controversial programs that their fees paid for, but there are so many more!!! Maybe make the selection process of programming more public and transparent to allow more people to have a say in the types of activities that are planned." -Anonymous Survey Respondent

Opt In vs. Opt Out: Closed-Ended Questions

The following chart was created in CampusLabs as a cross-tabulation between the first question (What was your decision?) and the other closed-ended questions. This chart allows for efficient comparison between student inputs regarding those students who opted in and out aside from the open-ended themes.

Q1. What was your decision?							
		Opt In (Option 1)		Opt Out (Option 2)		Total	
		Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Q2. Please help us understand how you made your decision.	I made my selection based on personal opinions.	341	89.50 %	111	84.09 %	**456**	**86.04 %**
	My academic advisor made my selection or told me which box to select.	3	0.79 %	0	0.00 %	**3**	**0.57 %**
	I wanted to get to the myUTK portal, so I just picked an answer.	26	6.82 %	8	6.06 %	**43**	**8.11 %**
	Other (please specify)	11	2.89 %	13	9.85 %	**28**	**5.28 %**
	Total	**381**	**100.00 %**	**132**	**100.00 %**	**530**	**100.00 %**
Q4. When deciding on which option to choose, did you fully understand the reason behind this change in policy that gives students the option to choose?	Yes (comments are optional)	279	73.23 %	88	66.67 %	**373**	**70.38 %**
	No (comments are optional)	102	26.77 %	44	33.33 %	**157**	**29.62 %**
	Total	**381**	**100.00 %**	**132**	**100.00 %**	**530**	**100.00 %**
Q5. Were you aware that you still had to pay the Student Programs and Services Fee regardless of your decision to opt-in or opt-out?	Yes	324	85.04 %	102	77.27 %	**435**	**82.08 %**
	No	30	7.87 %	20	15.15 %	**54**	**10.19 %**
	I wasn't sure.	27	7.09 %	10	7.58 %	**41**	**7.74 %**
	Total	**381**	**100.00 %**	**132**	**100.00 %**	**530**	**100.00 %**
Q6. It should be the choice of the student whether or not their $19.46 can be used to support student-organized programming on campus.	Agree	183	48.03 %	111	84.09 %	**307**	**57.92 %**
	Neutral	101	26.51 %	13	9.85 %	**116**	**21.89 %**
	Disagree	97	25.46 %	8	6.06 %	**107**	**20.19 %**
	Total	**381**	**100.00 %**	**132**	**100.00 %**	**530**	**100.00 %**
Q7. Students should be required to make this choice each semester.	Agree	130	34.12 %	75	56.82 %	**210**	**39.62 %**
	Neutral	82	21.52 %	27	20.45 %	**116**	**21.89 %**
	Disagree	169	44.36 %	30	22.73 %	**204**	**38.49 %**
	Total	**381**	**100.00 %**	**132**	**100.00 %**	**530**	**100.00 %**
Q8. Have you attended an event or function that was supported by these fees?	Yes	267	70.08 %	31	23.48 %	**304**	**57.36 %**
	No	47	12.34 %	78	59.09 %	**130**	**24.53 %**
	I don't know.	67	17.59 %	23	17.42 %	**96**	**18.11 %**
	Total	**381**	**100.00 %**	**132**	**100.00 %**	**530**	**100.00 %**
Q9. Has your decision to opt-in or opt-out changed since your fall 2014 selection?	Yes	8	2.10 %	16	12.12 %	**26**	**4.91 %**
	No	352	92.39 %	104	78.79 %	**461**	**86.98 %**
	I don't know.	21	5.51 %	12	9.09 %	**43**	**8.11 %**
	Total	**381**	**100.00 %**	**132**	**100.00 %**	**530**	**100.00 %**

Recommendations

Presented are suggestions from survey respondents regarding the opt-in/opt-out process in order to provide clarity for students:

- Provide information detailing programming and events directly funded through the Student Programs and Services Fees (i.e. provide an annual report).
- Clarify where the money will go if a student elects to opt-out.
- Provide information about the decision to opt-in or opt-out through alternative sources (social media, posters, videos, Q&A forums).
- When describing components of the opt-in and opt-out process, use easily understood phrasing (avoid legal jargon) and summarize the information (avoid lengthy explanations).
- Clarify if a student chooses to opt-out, they are opting-out of all student programming funded through the fee, not just Sex Week.
- Clarify the decision to opt-out does not mean exemption from the fee; inversely, the decision to opt-in does not mean the student pays an additional fee (the fee will be paid regardless of the decision to opt-in or opt-out).