Political involvement on the decline

Kent State becoming inactive, according to student organizations

Sara Macho
Daily Kent Stater

A full course load, social obligations and a part-time job.

With the many tasks students have in front of them, it may be difficult to remain politically active and involved in the community.

And according to some members of political organizations on campus, student participation in politics is seriously lacking.

"There’s this stereotype that Kent State University is so liberal and everyone is so educated and opinionated," said Yvonne Dunham, a graduate student in teaching English as a second language. "But the average undergrad is generally not informed."

Matt White, president of the College Republicans, said membership has been down since the 2004 election cycle. The main objective of the College Republicans is to promote the principles of the Republican party to students.

but this may be hard to do on a seemingly apathetic campus.

Elizabeth Vild, member of the International Socialist Organization, which supports an equal distribution of wealth and resources across America, said not only students but also young people in the United States are apathetic.

"Many may agree with an anti-war movement, but they don’t do anything about it," Vild said. "They have a sense of hopelessness."

Vild attributes this "sense of hopelessness" to what is traditionally taught in the classroom.

"Students are taught the history of the ruling class, not the history of the working class and different movements throughout the years," she said. "Students read only a blurb of how these movements got shut down."

Vild also added that if a political movement gets larger, people will not get targeted by the ruling class and be forced to quit demonstrating.

Too busy to be involved

Some members of the International Socialist Organization agree that students may simply be too busy to be politically active.

"There are plenty of groups to be involved in, but students here are also very busy," said Chris Kok, member of the ISO. "I mean, it’s like, do you want to go to another meeting after a day of classes or just sit back and watch TV?"

Kok said he thinks more than half of the Kent State campus is against the war, but students are not motivated to do anything about it.

"Look at all the anti-Bush shirts that students wear," Kok said. "But they don’t engage in any serious activity to stop the war."

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The ISO and the Kent State Anti-War Committee recently held an anti-war and anti-army recruitment demonstration in Risman Plaza.

Some participants were disappointed with the attendance turnout.

“People are jaded right now,” Niles said. “They don’t have a lot of faith that something like this would make a difference.”

Organization members disagree.

“We want students to take part in an anti-war effort,” Vild said. “It’s extremely important not to be afraid and think you have to be represented. Every person matters and counts. Just get up and do it.”

Past versus present

But it may not be that easy when students are living in a historically politically active college town.

According to Theodore J. Voneida, 75, of Kent, the events of May 4 may have triggered negative attitudes between Kent city residents and university students.

“Whenever there is a large university in a city with just as many residents, there’s bound to be problems,” Voneida said. “These problems were exacerbated during the murders of 1970. A fear took over and that animosity has carried over today.”

Voneida has been an anti-war activist for 45 years. He hosted a radio program on the Cleveland station, WCLV, on the Vietnam war for two years during the late 60s and early 70s.

Nicole Robinson, member of the Kent State Anti-War Committee, said students led an anti-war movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s that showed the world college-aged students do care about political issues.

And campus political organizations are trying to get present-day students to become more involved.

Taryn Leggett, president of the May 4 Task Force, said students need motivation to care about politics.

“Students are stepping back unless there’s something that draws their attention,” Leggett said.

Members of political organizations offered suggestions to increase political awareness among students.

Andy Nelsen, member of the ISO, said students need to read more news publications and attend campus events, such as those featuring speakers.

Leggett said organizations need to keep people excited about events.

“Hold frequent events and advertise well for them,” she said. “Raise awareness by explaining and giving reasons to participate.”

Contact student politics reporter Sara Macho at smacho@kent.edu.
May 4 Task Force may lose block funding

Sara Macho
Daily Kent Stater

Executive Director William Ross met with the May 4 Task Force Thursday to discuss a bill that could potentially remove block funding for the student organization. The Undergraduate Student Senate will tentatively vote on the bill at its meeting Friday.

If the bill is passed, the funds usually set aside for the task force will be made available to all student organizations, according to a press release from USS.

Currently, the task force automatically receives 1.75 percent block funding, or roughly $10,000 each academic year. The organization uses this money towards May 4 commemoration activities. If the task force uses all the allotted funding, it can request more from the Allocations Committee.

“The purpose of this bill is to make sure everyone plays by the same rules,” said Kevin Folk, business and finance senator. “No one student organization is above any other.”

But Taryn Leggett, president of the task force, said she is upset over how the bill was originally presented.

According to Leggett, the bill was sent to her as an unnamed e-mail.

“I was a little shocked to receive this no subject e-mail saying our organization could lose its permanent block funding,” she said. “The bill was sent to the task force without prior consultation.”

Folk said USS is not trying to handicap the organization. The task force should go through the same process as every other student organization, he said. If the bill is passed, the task force can still go through the allocations process.

If an organization wants to host an event, a request form must be filed with the Allocations Committee. Representatives from the organization will then present their requests to the committee at its weekly meeting.

Sarah Goldstein, past president of the task force, said she is worried about how the status of the organization will change if the bill is passed.

“If everyone and their brother is presenting a request for a May 4 commemoration event, it defeats the purpose of the May 4 Task Force,” she said.

Leggett said the task force is entrusted with keeping May 4 alive.

“We are recognized as the commemoration organization,” she said.

Some members of the task force said they are willing to take action if the bill is passed.

“USS has a backbone, a spine, on this campus,” said Kevin Heade, member of the May 4 Task Force. “The task force should take authoritative action ‘cause the organization is about to be ripped off.”

Contact student politics reporter Sara Macho at smacho@kent.edu.
Ending of block funding a good idea

Last Friday's Undergraduate Student Senate meeting marked a magnificent example of student governing when Kevin Folk and Bill Ross proposed to remove block funding for the May 4 Task Force. The Task Force receives 1.75 percent of allocations money each year, which equals around $10,000 of unpetitioned money this year. This money is just a base amount, as they can request further funds.

Normally, a student organization must put together a program, research all of its costs, fill out the appropriate paperwork and present their request before the allocations committee, which is headed by Kevin Folk, student senator for business and finance. The May 4 Task Force, on the other hand, has $10,000 automatically allocated to them.

This new move does not mean that their will be no more May 4 ceremonies (regardless of how happy that might make some people around campus), but that the Task Force will have to work earlier in the year to plan their events, assess the costs and jump through the appropriate bureaucratic hoops. This editorial board, for reasons of equity between all student organizations, supports this proposal and encourages students to tell any and every USS senator how they feel on the matter.

The case can (and probably will) be made that May 4 is an intricate piece of Kent State history and our consciousness should always be, in part, with those four tragic deaths (and numerous injuries) that occurred at that fateful, rebellious day. The case would then suggest to ensure that no snafu occurs in the allocations process the May 4 Task Force be given certain funds every year (probably with the right to request more if they do desire).

However, why it is a student organization's responsibility to continue this legacy is not as clear. Certainly the university does their part by canceling classes for two hours on that day and could probably even put together some programming if needed. Why, then, should it become a student group's responsibility, particularly when that student group doesn't take responsibility to get the necessary funds anyway? It is for this reason, predominantly, this editorial board can not stand by block funding.

Furthermore, block funding, in general, is a bad idea. Actually, it's a rather good idea, but could be used, legally, by so many different groups that most allocations could be blocked away before any new or other student group could get the funds.

Example: College students are still one of the highest spending demographics when it comes to cinema, both big screen and rentals, so a case could easily be made the International Film Society should be given block funding that would permit them to bring to campus one movie a week, to be shown on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, at no cost to undergraduates. Such a move would reach students where they are already passionate and foster a sense of community. Such a program seems like a good idea.

Fortunately, however, the allocation's committee knows the best policy is to let student groups act quickly and efficiently to guarantee their funds. Any other way is just undemocratic and unfair. It seems painfully ironic that the May 4 Task Force, a group who celebrates the lives of those students that died while practicing so boldly their democratic freedom, would recommend any other way of receiving funding.

The above editorial is the consensus of the Daily Kent Stater editorial board, whose members are listed to the left.
May 4 more than ‘intricate’; it’s history

Dear Editor:

Imagine my surprise when I read the Stater Online for the first time and found the nonsense in the editorial regarding funding for the May 4 Task Force. An “intricate” part of Kent State history? I think it is a little more than that. It is part of national history. And, I think, we may be reliving it to some extent with the Iraq war and misleading information from national leadership.

Joyce Hann
Class of ‘79
Block funding needs to continue for May 4 Task Force

On Oct. 7, Undergraduate Student Senate Executive Director William Ross and Senator Kevin Folk introduced a bill to revoke permanent funding provided to the May 4 Task Force for the annual May 4 commemoration. An Oct. 8 press release quotes Mr. Ross:

"The allocations amendment is designed to ensure that all student organizations have an equal and fair opportunity for funding to commemorate an event that is the shared heritage of all Kent State students."

While this may sound reasonable on the surface, closer examination suggests otherwise.

The May 4 Task Force was established by the Kent State student government in 1975 to continue the annual commemoration of May 4. The Task Force has continued this tradition for 30 years, and is open to anyone who wishes to join.

The University does not pay for the commemoration; the Task Force has historically had to compete with other student organizations for funding through the regular student allocations process. In 2001, there were insufficient funds available for the commemoration due to heavy expenditures by other student organizations. That year, emergency funding was provided through the office of the university president.

Because of the significance of the commemoration to the Kent State community, in 2003

Karen Cunningham
Guest Columnist

USS proposed a bill that would guarantee at least minimal funding for these events. A large majority of the student body supported this decision (based on a student referendum held in 2003), and the university administration worked with USS to determine the best way to fairly and legally implement this provision. The provision sets aside 1.75 percent of student allocations to fund the May 4 commemoration. These funds cannot be used by the Task Force for any other activities. The Task Force is not guaranteed these funds, which are only released once the program details are approved by USS. This is essentially the same process required of any other student organization, with the only difference being that the amount is pre-approved.

Further investigation reveals that since 2003:

- No other student organization has requested funding for an event related to a commemoration of May 4.
- The allocations account has not been exhausted in the past few years; funds have rolled over year to year.

In other words, the funding provided to the Task Force for the May 4 commemoration has not resulted in any other group being denied funding for their programs and has not prevented any group from participating in the planning of the commemoration. The claim that a change is needed to ensure "equal and fair opportunity for funding to commemorate" May 4 cannot be substantiated. Passage of this bill would only reinstate a problem, which was resolved by the diligent and thoughtful efforts of the 2003 Student Senate. It would ignore the wishes of the student body who supported that provision. And it could potentially jeopardize the continued observance of an event that is an integral part of the history of Kent State, the nation and the world.

The bill will be discussed at the USS meeting on Friday, Oct. 21, at 3:15 in the Governance Chambers. Please help the Task Force to preserve the tradition of May 4 by urging USS to reject this bill.

Karen Cunningham is the faculty advisor of the May 4 Task Force and a guest columnist for the Daily Kent Stater.
May 4 Task Force needs commemoration funds

Dear Editor,

I was disturbed to read in the Oct. 18 Stater that the May 4 Task Force once again faces the removal of block funding for its annual commemoration. For those of us familiar with the work of the Task Force over the past 30 years, this latest challenge is sad; even sadder, it's not surprising.

The May 4 Task Force has been, at times, the sole caretaker of the memory of May 4, 1970. When the administration adopted a misguided public relations strategy in the 1970s of simply pretending that the shootings never happened (fearing that acknowledging the shootings would hurt enrollment), the Task Force served as the University's conscience. Year after year the Task Force has provided thought-provoking, heartfelt commemorations and is a valuable source of education about the tragic events at both Kent State and Jackson State.

Removing block funding would seriously dilute the Task Force's ability to meet its mission. Kevin Folk suggests that no student organization is above any other; I would respectfully disagree. The Task Force is unlike any other student organization, rather, it is a gatekeeper of American history. Nearly two generations of Americans today were not alive on May 4, 1970. A vibrant and funded May 4 Task Force is needed now today more than ever.

Mike Sorohan
Class of '81, Co-chairman, May 4 Task Force
1977-78
USS delays vote on task force funding

Sara Macho
Daily Kent Stater

The Undergraduate Student Senate decided last week to postpone voting on an automatic block funding for the May 4 Task Force.

The USS will discuss the May 4 Task Force Bill further during the Allocation Committee's Ad Hoc process, which is scheduled for sometime in April.

If passed on Friday, the bill would remove the task force's block funding of roughly $10,000, or 1.75 percent of student activity fees. The organization uses this money towards May 4 commemoration activities. If the task force uses all the allotted funding, it can request more from the Allocations Committee.

The task force should go through the same process as every other student organization when planning events, said Kevin Folk, Undergraduate Student Senate business and finance senator.

"The purpose of the task force bill is to make sure everyone plays by the same rules," he said. "No one student organization is above any other."

If the bill is passed, it could cause the task force to reschedule events it had been planning since summer, said Sarah Goldstein, a past president of the task force.

"At this point in the year, we have to set up a schedule that we'd have to adjust," she said.

The USS represents all students and not just a few student organizations or one in particular, USS executive director William Ross said.

"I cannot stress the importance of listening to all the undergraduate students and not just one student organization over any other," he said. "We must treat all student organizations the same."

The extra time will give students and organizations more time to voice opinions and concerns, Folk said.

"This a better avenue," he said.

"It gives us extra time."

Currently, every student organization needs to bring its request for an event to the Allocations Committee. Each year, the senator for business and finance chairs the Ad Hoc Committee and reviews the guidelines from the year.

Contact student politics reporter Sara Macho at smachoe@kent.edu.
Dear Editor:

Memory has become a significant area of inquiry for scholars examining the past. One of its leading practitioners, historian David Blight, describes public memory as the way "in which groups ... construct versions of the past and employ them for self-understanding and to win power in an ever-changing present."

Thirty years ago, upon learning that the administration would no longer sponsor a May 4 commemoration, students organized the May 4 Task Force to carry on the remembrance. Ever since, on the eve of the anniversary of the killings, the group conducts a vigil to honor those shot to death by the National Guard during an antiwar protest. On the anniversary itself, the M4TF sponsors speakers who remember the lives that were lost and examine the meaning of the sacrifice in light of contemporary events.

In doing so, the M4TF has enjoyed the support of the parents of the four slain students, of whom I am one, and the encouragement of nine other casualties. Understandably, we are not interested in seeing this occasion defamed by those who would pervert the meaning of the killings. It is offensive to those of us who took bullets on May 4 that the editors of the Daily Kent Stater would depart from the position of previous editors in an effort to cut funding for the M4TF.

Current editors seem dismissive of the student referendum in 2003, which approved permanent funding for the annual M4TF commemoration. There is, of course, a purpose to this. The Kent killings have come to be seen as a vital marker in time when millions of people tried to alter the foreign policy of their government. This is a political memory, which many conservatives cannot abide and, therefore, wish to assign to oblivion. Evidently, this is also an endeavor to which Stater editors are happy to contribute their energies. Like-minded readers should be advised, however, that decades of tradition and the accompanying historical consciousness that has emerged about the killings — along with the force of a democratic vote — will not yield easily to those who would dispense with this legacy of dissent.

Thomas M. Grace, Ph.D.  
Buffalo, NY
May 4 Task Force a waste of funding

Karen Cunningham, the new adviser to the May 4 Task Force, sounds like a very reasonable person. Her defense of continued block funding for the May 4 Task Force was both articulate and logical. What is illogical is that she is defending a group that consists, for the most part, of incessant propagandists. The memory of May 4 is not best served by mindless sloganeering, attempts to glorify student protest (an issue, I can assure you, no grown-up cares about), insistence on including convicted cop-killers in their programs or conducting vicious attacks not only against their enemies, but friends of the victims: People who agree that May 4 was a major historic injustice, or who were themselves wounded on May 4, 1970.

I got my first introduction to the M4TF’s mindset back in the 1980s when I asked its members if I could speak at its programs. At that time, my book on May 4 had not yet been published, but I had written a number of articles and opinion pieces and was clearly a friend of the victims. I was also the only person to actually review all the historical documents — the FBI’s report, the trial transcripts, Richard Nixon’s papers, various archives, etc. Not only was I an expert, but I was an insider with liberal credentials, someone one would think would be welcomed by the organization. Not only did the M4TF refuse to let me speak, but when I tried to go around it and contacted other student groups, I was subjected to vicious attacks. Kids I had never met claimed my views were not valid. What they were really saying was that my values were much too mainstream and middle class.

Here they were, a group of Kent State students entrusted to be the custodians of the memory of May 4, and they were trying to block a leading authority on the tragedy from speaking. This kind of nonsense happens all the time. This year, the M4TF invited — then quickly uninvited — Phil Caputo, the author of 13 Seconds, when it discovered he too had no interest in reliving its glory days of protest. Many of you probably are not surprised to learn that during its 30-year existence, the Kent State community has never heard from any author of a major study of May 4.

In the meantime, the M4TF has invited plenty of speakers who may keep alive its spirit of protest but who have nothing to say about May 4. Some of the surviving victims of May 4, who are extremely frustrated with the organization, have told me they consider the M4TF’s programs to be nauseating. One of them even told me he boycotted M4TF programs for years. Has not anyone caught on that if this group has accomplished anything, it has been to create an enormous backlash against anything to do with May 4?

Is not it time that Kent State stop paying, for this nonsense and provide an alternative? I often hear about students who join the M4TF, only to drop out once they realize what the group is all about. I would love to see some of those dropouts come forward and establish an alternative to the M4TF.

Student government needs to keep funding May 4 programming. It just does not need to fund this cult.

William A. Gordon is a 1973 graduate of Kent State, the author of Four Dead in Ohio: Was There a Conspiracy at Kent State? and a guest columnist for the Daily Kent Stater. Contact him at BGordonLA@aol.com.
May 4 Task Force block funding wrong

Undergraduate Student Senators Bill Ross and Kevin Folk are trying to make lemonade out of lemons.

Bill F0503, intended to remove block funding for the May 4 Task Force, was removed from voting at Friday's USS meeting after being introduced two weeks prior. Senators Folk and Ross introduced the bill to, frankly, “level the playing field, and make sure everyone is playing the same game with the same rules,” Folk said.

The current block funding was initiated three years ago by then Senator Seth Kujat, who was also the president of the May 4 Task Force. That particular year, the May 4 Task Force had an allocations snafu that nearly resulted in it not getting any funds. Kujat’s initiation of block funding was to ensure that those sort of mistakes by May 4 Task Force leaders wouldn’t leave May 4 commemoration dead in the water. At this time, Chuck Rickert was the interim vice president for student affairs and he signed off on the funding.

The Daily Kent Stater editorial board has already supported Folk and Ross’ initiative in a previous editorial, but it appeared that they both folded like a house of cards in Katrina when the proposed bill was removed from consideration and voting. Folk and Ross, however, point to conditions outside of their control.

Both had many meetings with different advisers, student groups and Dr. Pete Goldsmith, vice president for enrollment management and student affairs, which changed their stance — particularly their meeting with Goldsmith.

“Dr. Goldsmith had said this was something he wanted a lot of time to look at and he, according to university policy, has to sign off on any changes we make to the allocation guidelines,” Ross said. “He said he would not make the changes until the rest of the changes come through at our ad hoc allocations guideline meeting. Even if we had passed it, the changes wouldn’t take effect until next fall.”

Ross continued, “This was something we wanted to do immediately, but since it’s something we can’t do immediately, we decided to use time as a resource to garner some support from the student body and to ensure that we have our case set correctly.”

Ross sees the whole ordeal as a means for the university administration to “kill two birds with one stone,” by not having to fund May 4 commemorations itself and by ensuring that there “would never be any more controversy with the commemoration.”

Ross said the university administration was “not really thinking about the future of this decision. Now other student organizations are coming to the USS and saying, ‘Why not us too?’”

Senator Ross’ stance on this controversy is a correct one. It appears that the university, who has always tried to respectfully distance itself from the PR blot that is May 4, is being too opportunistic with the USS and the allocations committee.

This editorial board continues to support Ross and Folk’s efforts to remove May 4 block funding and challenges the university administration to trust the student leaders put in place by the students to decide these issues. For more years than block funding has existed, it hasn’t existed and it’s time that we return to the way things were not so long ago before political activism was given block funding.

The above editorial is the consensus of the Daily Kent Stater editorial board, whose members are listed to the left.
Dear Editor:

Just as the Kent State administration recently reprimanded Undergraduate Student Senate boss Bill Ross regarding May 4 Task Force block funding, somebody also needs to put Stater editors in their place this semester. Why does the Stater continue to refuse to reveal the whole story of this doomed controversy manufactured by Bill Ross and a few biased Stater editors?

Recently, your newspaper has published two Stater staff editorials and two front page stories, and always fails to mention the most important point about this block funding issue. In 2003, it was Kent State students who voted overwhelmingly to grant annual block funding to the May 4 Task Force to ensure annual commemorations of Kent State’s 1970 tragedy.

Why does the Stater prefer to repeatedly hide the fact that Kent State students voted to create block funding for the May 4 Task Force? Why deny the fact that in 2003, many campus organizations (including the Stater editors, USSR, BUS, KSU Greeks and others) supported annual guaranteed funding for the May 4 Task Force?

Why deceive 2005 Kent State students about 2003 events, including that year’s Stater editorial board support for this unique block funding? Will your editors continue to be so dishonest until you are replaced by probably more enlightened Stater editors next semester?

Please tell the whole story so the community can understand why sensitive Kent State leaders understand the impossibility of disregarding a 2003 vote by Kent State students in support of the May 4 Task Force. Any misguided attempt to subvert the 2003 Kent State election referendum vote will trigger national controversy.

Alan Canfora
Director, Kent May 4 Center