



RICE UNIVERSITY
STUDENT ASSOCIATION

Blanket Tax Standing Committee 2015-2016

Report on Review Rice Video Productions Subsidiary Status

Abstract

Rice Video Productions is a subsidiary student organization as the official television station of the student body. The Blanket Tax Committee has reviewed Rice Video Productions and recommends that the Student Senate **approve** to **remove** Rice Video Production's subsidiary status.

Evaluation

X.A.4.e.ii of the Student Association Bylaws establishes criteria for the Blanket Tax Standing Committee to consider when considering whether or not an organization the committee should consider revoking priority access. The Committee must find that an organization satisfies one or more of the criteria in order to recommend revoking subsidiary status. The Committee presents its findings with regard to each criterion below.

Criterion 1:

Priority access is no longer appropriate for the organization based on the purpose and criteria set forth in Section X.A.4.c Section X.A.4.c and Section X.A.4.e of the Student Association Bylaws establishes general criteria for the Blanket Tax Standing Committee to consider when reviewing an a proposal for subsidiary status or review of an existing subsidiary status.

1. Would the requested funds benefit the student body and the Rice community?

The Blanket Tax Standing Committee believes that the requested funds **would not** benefit all of the student body and the Rice community. Rice Video Productions recently transitioned its organization goals to producing short videos. These videos would primarily be distributed through their YouTube and Facebook pages. The Blanket Tax Committee strongly feels that this transition away from filming cultural shows, student association meetings, and various other programming events on campus to short videos, which so far have been limited, may not serve all of the interests of the student body. Furthermore, Rice Video Productions has failed to show student interest in this transition with a formal poll of its own. The organization has claimed to have done an informal poll. Although as a committee we cannot dictate what

kinds of productions to produce, we can question whether or not they serve the interests of the student body. A reason that the organization claims for the transition is a lack of interest from their members. The question the committee requests student senate to ask is if an organization does not have interest from within to function, should they be deserving of blanket tax funds. Furthermore, the organization no longer offers their services to the student body for free. They are transitioning to a model that will potentially charge all organizations minimum wage per person to film cultural events or programming. They claim that this is necessary to motivate its members to film events such as cultural shows, which the Blanket Tax Committee feels are valuable to the student body. Furthermore, Rice Video Production claims that they have transitioned to offering their equipment for rent to students for free. The Blanket Tax Committee believes that this is a redundant use of student money given that the Digital Media Center offers video production equipment. Finally, the committee finds that the Rice Video Productions have deviated from their original mission and purpose for which students have voted them as a subsidiary organization as the "official television station of the student body." As such the Blanket Tax Committee feels that Rice Video Productions should be put forth to the student body to evaluate whether or not they serve the interests of the student body and the Rice community.

2. Would the requested funds contribute to the organization's mission, purpose, and goals?

The Blanket Tax Standing Committee finds the funds will contribute to the organization's mission, purpose and goals by financially supporting their video equipment purchases.

3. Does the organization have a strong financial need?

The Blanket Tax Standing Committee finds that Rice Video Productions does have a strong financial need.

4. Have all other reasonable means of acquiring funding been exhausted?

The Blanket Tax Standing Committee finds that Rice Video Productions has not exhausted all means of acquiring funds. The Blanket Tax Standing Committee finds that Rice Video Productions has not looked into forming partnerships with Rice Visual and Dramatic Arts or any corporate sponsors.

5. Is the organization's financial need long-term and annual?

The Blanket Tax Standing Committee finds that Rice Video Production's financial need is long-term but not annual as most of their expenses are dedicated to equipment purchases.

6. Proper Budgeting

The Blanket Tax Committee finds Rice Video Productions' budgeting not appropriate. Rice Video Productions has had to submit their budgets multiple times due to miscommunication between their advisor and their organization. Furthermore, Rice Video Productions has blatantly transformed their budget without proper approval from the Blanket Tax Committee earlier this year.

Criterion 2:

The organization has repeatedly and seriously violated the standards for use of blanket tax funds set forth in Section X.A.5, as determined by the University Constitution of the Rice University Student Association Constitution and has subsequently failed to take appropriate steps to address these violations such that the Standing Committee no longer has confidence in its stewardship of student money.

The Blanket Tax Committee does find that violations to the standards of use of blanket tax money have been made by Rice Video Productions. Rice Video Productions has clearly made large changes to their approved budgets without formal outreach to the blanket tax committee. They have also shown a clear lack of knowledge of the student constitution and blanket tax procedures in regards to their improper change in leadership. Furthermore, there have been clear discrepancies in their budgets that have taken a semester to resolve. In total, these violations have resulted in the Blanket Tax Committee's decision that Rice Video Productions has not been a good steward of student money. However, to our knowledge these violations have not been annual. Previous committee's have expressed concern but have not made formal proceedings as done this year. As such the Blanket Tax Committee cannot find Rice Video Productions in repeated and serious violations to the standards for use of blanket tax funds.

Conclusion

As thoroughly discussed above, the Blanket Tax Standing Committee finds that the Rice Video Productions satisfies one of the above criteria for removal of subsidiary status. This alone is sufficient for a recommendation to **approve** the proposal to **remove** Rice Video Productions from its subsidiary status.

As such, formally, The Student Association Blanket Tax Standing Committee for the 2015-2016 academic year hereby recommends that the Student Senate **approve** the proposal to **remove** Rice Video Productions from its subsidiary status.

Respectfully submitted, Sai Chilakapati
Chair, Blanket Tax Standing Committee

Rice Video Productions' Statement in Response to the Blanket Tax Committee's Report

If anyone has any questions or would like more information, please feel free to email us at ricevideoproductions@rice.edu. Main points are highlighted and bolded. The Blanket Tax Committee is abbreviated as the BTC.

1. Introduction & Timeline

While we appreciate that the BTC has spent a lot of time deliberating the issue of maintaining or revoking our blanket tax status, we nonetheless feel that our voice has not been heard - and that the BTC has not appropriately consulted or communicated with us in making its decision. As detailed below, we met with the BTC a total of 4 times, and only in the last of these meetings did the committee--without warning, and after having already voting on the issue—decide to discuss reasons for revoking our status. In addition, the only information the BTC asked us to provide via email was related to our budget/rollover issue - which is unrelated to Criterion 1--the criterion by which it made its decision.

Ultimately, we do not feel that the committee made a “fair and informed decision by engaging in appropriate deliberations and discussions by gathering appropriate information” as the committee is obligated to per Section X.A.6.a of the SA Constitution.

Date: 11/25/15

Time: 4:15

Attendees: Sai (SA Treasurer), Patrick (RVP Station Manager), and Jeremy (RVP Programming Director)

Discussed: budget question from in Nov. 18 Thresher article

Date: 12/12/15

Time: 2:00

Attendees: Blanket Tax Committee, Patrick (RVP Station Manager), Jeremy (RVP Programming Director), Rachel (RVP Member)

Discussed: Addressing the budget question in more detail

Sometime after this (date/time was not revealed to us), the BTC votes to recommend us for revoking status without informing RVP. We hear a rumor about it at the beginning of January, so

we reach out to the BTC asking for an update. The BTC asks to have a meeting with us - but does not tell us anything about their decision.

Date: 01/19/16

Time: 5:30

Attendees: Sai (SA Treasurer), Patrick (RVP Station Manager), Jeremy (RVP Programming Director), Will (RVP Advisor)

Discussed: Confirms rumor RVP heard about the BTC

Date: 01/27/16

Time: 4:30

Attendees: Blanket Tax Committee, Patrick (RVP Station Manager), Jeremy (RVP Programming Director), Rachel (RVP Member)

Discussed: Decision to recommend revoking RVP blanket tax status

We only got ~1 hour to speak to the Blanket Tax Committee about its reservations relating to Criterion 1. Additionally, this was only after it had already voted on making the recommendation to revoke our funding.

2. History of Our Organization

Rice Broadcast Television became a blanket tax organization in 2001. In the following year, the organization changed its name to Rice Television (RTV) - and then in the fall of 2015 (last semester), it changed its name to Rice Video Productions (RVP). RVP's mission is "to provide the undergraduate body of Rice University with a variety of programming and video technologies."

Rice Broadcast Television originally broadcasted on a closed circuit television station. Some of our organization's most popular videos in the past included *Top Cocktail* (a chef show on how to make drinks), *24 Hour Show* (broadcast of different shows and video game competitions), a filming of *Hello Hamlet*, and a comedic fake investigative news show.

A lot has changed from 2001 to 2016 in how people consume video. The Internet has largely overtaken television as the predominant mode of viewing video content - especially among younger crowds. With access to so much content, people's expectations for quality in content

are now higher than ever - especially with the increased availability and affordability of advanced video equipment and technologies.

By putting our content on the Internet, we can collect data on both viewer engagement and the number of people watching our videos—which ultimately gives us a better idea of how to keep up with these new and increasing expectations.

3. Criterion 1

The Blanket Tax Committee found problems under Criterion 1, which addresses how organizations serve the student body. We believe that a big part of serving the student body includes creating videos Rice students are *actually interested* in watching - and, as such we are always working to find and create the best possible content to engage the student body. Everyone at Rice Video Productions—from our advisor to our leadership to our members—is not only obligated, but also heavily invested in serving the student body's interests—and not our just our own.

3.1 Content Choices

The BTC has concerns about whether or not our changes in content serve the interests of the entire student body. First, we would like to address some misconceptions the blanket tax committee has about our content.

Yes, we have stopped filming SA meetings and are cutting back on filming cultural shows. However, we have only chosen to do so because our YouTube data shows that not only do these videos acquire relatively few views compared to our other videos, but that the average view durations for these videos are also especially low.

When someone requests that we film a video, we look at three factors:

- (1) how much we think the student body will enjoy watching the video,
- (2) the amount of time it will take to film the video,
- (3) our members' interest in making that video.

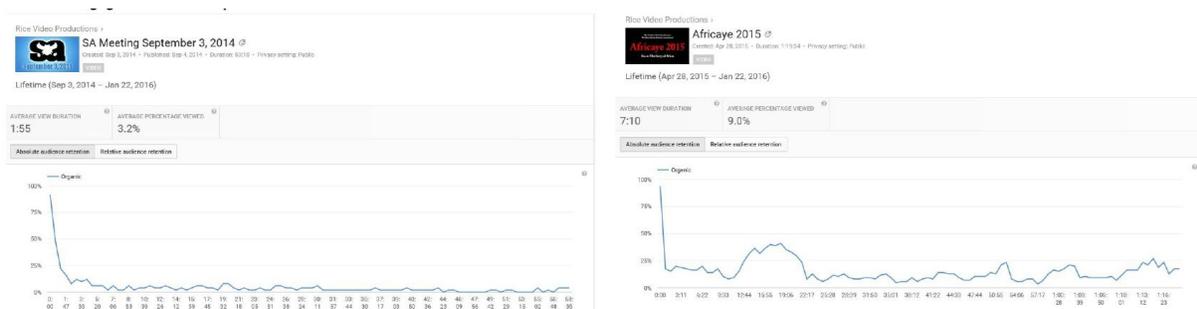
Our current lineup of videos this semester (some which have already been filmed or mostly filmed) includes:

- a comedy spoof of Man vs. Wild set at Rice

- a Kinda Sketchy sketch (01/31)
- SA Presidential Debates (02/12)
- the upcoming Kinda Sketchy performance (02/13)
- a hidden camera social experiment video
- the upcoming Rice TEDx talks (02/20)
- a music video for the mariachi club
- a live KTRU performance (02/09)
- a short video on diversity at Rice
- more to be determined as the semester progresses.

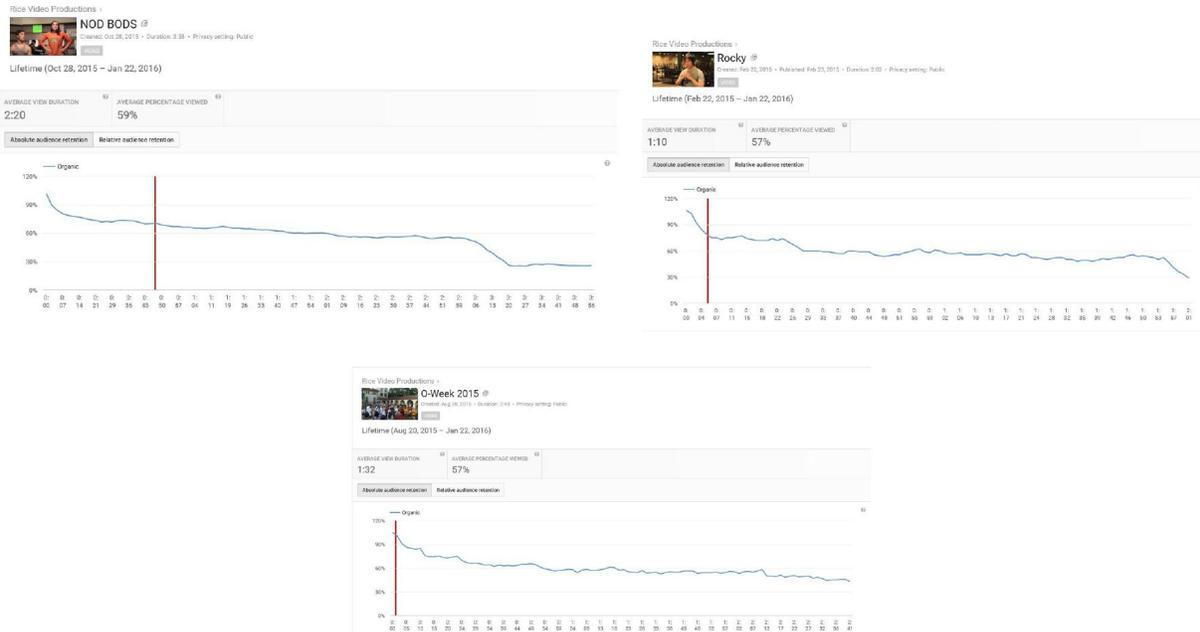
Our current lineup of videos includes student performances from a number of student organizations. Thus, we believe that all the videos we plan make this semester will ultimately serve the student body.

To further elaborate on our decision to cut back on filming SA Meetings, we [notified the SA](#) about these changes and did not hear any complaints. We have YouTube data to show that students do not value these videos. Furthermore, these videos not only have relatively low overall views—**they also have low viewer engagement** as evidenced by the graphs below.



Figures 1 and 2: These graphs show percentage of people watching at each time in the average SA meeting and cultural show

By contrast, Figures 3, 4 and 5 show our more creatively-inclined videos have a much **higher viewer engagement.**



Figures 3, 4, and 5: These graphs show percentage of people watching at each time in the video

A list of our top videos can be found on [this spreadsheet](#) (includes information about the types of videos, views, view length, etc).

Per the BTC’s formal statement, “[a] reason that the organization claims for the transition is a lack of interest from their members.” The BTC, however, did not cite any of our other reasons - and we feel that it cherry-picked this particular reason without citing the others so as to make our organization seem as if we are purely self-serving. Our transition stems from a total three factors - the other two being (1) the lack of interest from the student body in watching the types of videos we moved away from creating (per our YouTube data, see at the end of this document) and (2) the enormous time commitment such videos take to film, edit, and produce.

3.2 Video Length

We are transitioning toward making shorter videos because people everywhere, including students, are more likely to watch shorter videos. There are lots of studies that confirm this trend (Ruedlinger - see reference below).

In addition, **the list of our top videos shows that the most watched ones are shorter**, and data analytics videos from the longer ones show that people only watched the videos for a very a short duration of time. The data about our top videos is on [this spreadsheet](#).

3.3 Distribution Method Change from Channel to Internet

We have stopped updating the content on our channel, but **we have evidence from a formal poll from the Office of Inst. Effectiveness through Fondren Library to show that 97% of students do not value viewing content on our TV channel and instead prefer YouTube and Facebook as their first choice in distribution method to watch student videos**. As a result, we have been trying our best to develop a social media presence through various events, contests, and other means - but we are still in the early stages of doing so. The exact results of the survey can be viewed [here](#).

3.4 Payment

The BTC stated in its recommendation that “the organization no longer offers their services to the student body for free.” This is not true. When we get a request to film a video, the *first thing we do* is check if any of our members is available to film the video. If people are, we film it for free. Sometimes, unfortunately, we can’t commit to filming because of scheduling commitments, so we tell the requesting organization that its members are welcome to use our equipment to film the event themselves - and that we can show them how to use our equipment.

We have NEVER paid a student with blanket tax money (as no blanket tax-funded organization is allowed to). During the last SA meeting, the BTC pointed out that one of our members was paid for filming and editing DJ Masimore’s Esperanza video—but we would like to clarify that DJ Masimore—not RVP—offered to pay this member with his (DJ Masimore’s) own money. In general, we think charging organizations/individuals for editing would be ONE WAY to better motivate students to edit long events and deliver fast results. The organization is currently exploring options of continuing to film cultural shows such as developing a class through the VADA department and charging minimum wage for editing.

During the last SA meeting, the BTC stated that the idea of paying students RVP members to film or edit videos is an “unethical.” We think this statement is an unfair and extreme characterization. First, there is precedent for paying student in blanket tax clubs—for example,

the Thresher pays students to write articles, funded through advertising revenue and not its blanket tax funds. Second, paying someone minimum wage is, quite frankly, a very good deal for this type of work. Hiring someone in the real world would cost much, much more. Of course, these expenses are affected by how expensive the equipment is, the workers' technical expertise, among other factors. However, since we currently receive funding for our equipment, we would only really be looking to charge minimum wage. (Again, we have not actually done so.) Last, this idea of paying students stems from our desire to more effectively and efficiently serve other students and organizations. If our members were paid, the turnover for editing would be much faster. Frankly, we think it is unethical to expect a student to spend 5 hours filming an event and another 10 hours editing the footage in one weekend for free—especially if that student has no intrinsic personal investment in that particular video. Nonetheless, we are also looking into finding external funding sources (similar to those that the Thresher has).

4. Criterion 2

Even though the Blanket Tax Committee did not find us at fault under Criterion 2, we would still like to address some issues with its comments in that section.

4.1 Budget Problems

In terms of our budget problems last semester, we would like to reiterate that we had no intentions to violate the blanket tax rules. We recognize and admit that there were a series of miscommunications within our organization and a misunderstanding of the changes in the new blanket tax rules. However, we have always been willing to address this issue and take any steps necessary to resolve it.

4.2 Change in Leadership

The BTC claims that we have had “a clear lack of knowledge of the student constitution in regards to their improper change in leadership.” However, we did try to properly change leadership - we emailed the SA multiple times and never heard back about changing our leadership officially. See proof [here](#) and [here](#).

4.3 Previous Blanket Tax Committee Reports

The BTC claims that “previous committee’s have expressed concern” with our budgets. This concern has never been communicated to us in the past, and all of our previous blanket tax reviews have come back in good standing. See our past three blanket tax results [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

5. Alternative Suggestions

We would like to suggest alternative courses of action for the SA to pursue since we have not heard feedback from the BTC about its concerns until after it voted to recommend defunding us. We feel that there should be steps in between before getting completely defunded. For example:

- (1) Give us more time to implement these changes to our club that we started last semester
- (2) Reduce our funding
- (3) Give us time to conduct a formal poll to students

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, we feel that the BTC did not appropriately consult or communicate with us in making its decision to recommend revoking our blanket tax status. As we said earlier, we do not feel that the committee made a “fair and informed decision by engaging in appropriate deliberations and discussions by gathering appropriate information” as it supposed to per Section X.A.6.a in the SA Constitution - and we feel (as opposed to do not[^]) that it did not give us a reasonable amount of time to address its concerns.

We would like to remind the SA that under the SA Constitution, recommending to revoke blanket tax status must fall under one of two criterion. The Blanket Tax Committee found us guilty under Criterion 1 in terms of not serving the student body. However, as we have outlined above, we ultimately feel that our changes in content and content delivery method do not deviate from our mission statement - and that we have never strayed away from our original mission/goal of from making videos to serve the student body.

If you have any questions, concerns, and/or feedback, please email us at ricevideoproductions@rice.edu.

References

Ruedlinger, Ben. "Does Length Matter?" *Wistia Blog*. Wistia, 7 May 2012. Web. 25 Jan. 2016.