

Picking up the tab for SCONA

By **Stacey Roberts**
Staff Writer

Financing for the Student Conference on National Affairs is a year-long process involving many hours of personal interviews, phone calls and some travel.

Bryan Tantzen, finance sub-chairman for SCONA, says all 75 members are involved in the fund-raising process and are encouraged to participate in at least two fund drive activities.

Tantzen, a sophomore economics major, says there is no university funding for SCONA and all funds are raised through the efforts of the committee members.

Tantzen says there are three main fund-raising efforts.

The largest and most successful effort is SCONA's use of fund drives.

"We begin the fund drives during the spring semester by conducting personal interviews and making phone calls to top businesses around the state," Tantzen says. "It's a great opportunity for students to interact with bank executives and other top entrepreneurs."

Tantzen says students are able to open doors and make contacts normally not established for another 10 to 15 years.

"The first people contacted are previous donors, many of which are past SCONA participants and are very prominent in the business world," Tantzen says. "Next we contact referrals of our previous donors and then past SCONA executives."

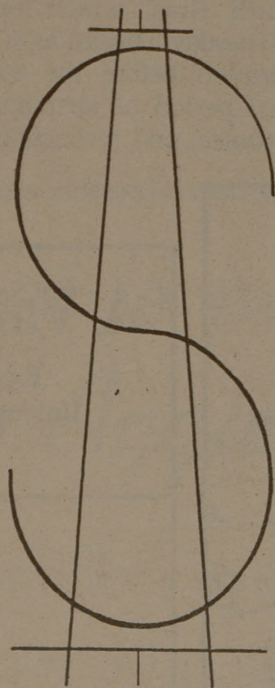
Students also travel to all major cities in the state and some have traveled as far as New York, Canada and Mexico to solicit donations.

"The students travel not only to raise funds but also to get a

better geographical representation of delegates to the conference," Tantzen says.

Theresa Chiang, program director of the Memorial Student Center and advisor to SCONA, says last year's conference was focused on China and four committee members were able to travel to China to get discussion ideas, recruit delegates and, inevitably, raise money.

"The MSC was sponsoring a trip to China and SCONA loaned money to the four students to go," Chiang says.



Putting on a conference as large as SCONA, which has 150 delegates registered so far this year, is not cheap.

Tantzen says SCONA costs approximately \$100,000 per year to finance, over half of which is raised from fund drives alone.

SCONA's next largest source of funds is provided by foundations and corporations. Tantzen says grant proposals are sent yearly to businesses requesting donations. Although approximately \$35,000 or one-third of SCONA's budget is raised this way, this sort of fund raising is affected by economic ups and downs. SCONA was hurt by the decline in the oil industry, Tantzen says, and the conference lost some of its normal contributors.

Other types of donations are more stable, including a 31-year-old \$3,000 Houston Endowment, a \$5,000 endowment from an anonymous donor and a newly created \$5,000 RKG Endowment, all received yearly.

Tantzen says a favorite SCONA story involves the Houston Endowment which, in addition to its normal contribution, gladly sent an extra \$3,000 a few years ago to help bail the financially troubled conference out. It turned out that SCONA raised enough money to cover expenses so the conference returned the money to the Houston Endowment.

"The Houston Endowment was so surprised at the honesty and integrity of SCONA they have been with us ever since," Tantzen says. "They had never had anyone be so honest before."

SCONA's third way of raising money is through delegate fees and miscellaneous sales such as t-shirts and other paraphernalia. Registration fees are \$95, and along with the miscellaneous sales, these sources contribute approximately \$15,000 to SCONA.

Chiang says this year's conference is close to achieving the full financing needed and is sure there will not be a deficit. A few times in the past, this wasn't always so, she says. One way SCONA is trying to ensure financial solvency is by setting up permanent endowment fund, a possibility the conference is investigating.

"As SCONA continues to grow," Chiang says, "students won't have the time or energy to contend with fund raising. The endowment would serve as extra security."

Tantzen says the idea for the endowment was conceived last year at SCONA's 30th anniversary, where 27 of the past 30

SCONA chairmen were gathered for a celebration.

"So many of our past chairmen have benefitted from their experiences with SCONA," Tantzen says, "and they are willing to put something back into the organization. They also understand how important it is for us to stay completely student run, without outside interference from individuals and university funding. We didn't want the endowment to come from an individual because that sometimes brings negative connotations."

The goal for the endowment is to raise approximately \$20,000 to use as a buffer, not as a yearly source of income.

"SCONA's budget is so large that if we're off a mere 3 percent that means we have a \$3,000 deficit," Tantzen says. "If we have this buffer zone, we won't have to worry as much and if we have a surplus we can put it back into the endowment."

An advisory board has only met once to establish goals, policies and member requirements but will meet officially for the first time during this year's conference.

Tantzen says there are 12 voting members on the advisory board, including previous SCONA chairmen, SCONA's advisor, and the MSC director.

There are also three non-voting members which include the finance subchairman, the planning subchairman and the vice-chairman of fund drives.

"Estimates show that SCONA will make its \$110,000 budget this year," Tantzen says. "That includes the purchase of a computer to help with our fund-raising efforts."