

VSA Council Minutes

September 6, 2009

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM.

2. Attendance

Proxies: 2013

Guests:

3. Special Guests

Special Guests Betsy Eismeier, Vice President of Finance and Administration, and Rachel Kitzinger, Dean of Planning and Academic Affairs spoke to the council on the financial situation of the college.

Mrs. Eismeier stated that the college had been surprised by the economic crisis and signs had been seen around campus in the form of job loss, etc. Despite some signs of stabilization over the summer, the trustees of the college, still felt that it was best to prepare for a long and slow recovery. This was year 2 of the economic crisis and they have been working with administration and students to create a plan for the future.

One of the key committees in the planning process, the priorities and planning committee, has been allowed a student representative since President Hill's arrival. The task of the committee is to look over the course of many years and to plan for the future.

According to Mrs. Eismeier, the Need-Blind Admission Policy is one of the big challenges of the College. This year, Vassar had the largest applicant pool in its history and the financial aid office has been extremely busy reviewing applications as well as searching for increased resources. The college will meet the need of continuing students, as demonstrated by their financial papers and there has been an increase in applications from these students. The resources for financial aid arrive from the endowment, starting with Matthew Vassar's original contribution. The endowment provides a little over 30% of the budget, 10% is from gifts. 40% of the income comes from hard hit sources and they are forced to reconsider some ideas.

Mrs. Kitzinger said that the college has been reorganizing and restructuring to try to lower the school's largest expense, compensation. Compensation is comprised of salaries and benefits. The college staff is organized into 2 large unions and most conversations are around staffing situations. It is incredibly difficult to change the budget structure.

Mrs. Kitzinger also stated that maintenance of the aging physical plant of the college is incredibly important, as well as a costly endeavor. While it is tempting to delay putting money into the physical plant, preferring postponing updates to firing workers, there are still improvements that need to be completed and there are many projects that are "dear to people's hearts." The new science building was given as an example.

Recently, they posted a website, economy.vassar.edu, that would give basic financial information about the college and allow students to ask questions. The website will be updated monthly based on the questions received. The website also contains links to other schools and information on how they are dealing with similar problems.

Noyes raised concerns about the closing of the library and suggested moving the closed hour from night to morning. Unfortunately, according to Mrs. Kitzinger, the staff is unionized and shifting hours is very difficult. While they would like to use student workers, there is a lot of work behind the scenes and they cannot. She acknowledged the importance of the library to students, and hoped to resolve the issue quickly.

With major physical plant renovations offline, Lathrop wondered what money should and could be invested for smaller scale dorm improvements. Mrs. Eismeier suggested contacting B&G. She also pointed out that there are multiple problems with renovations and that the schedule was being reworked to focus on smaller improvements, with no date for

the next large scale renovation. Mrs. Kitzinger suggested that small projects be brought to the reslife staff and that these small improvements can make a significant improvement in student lives. Unfortunately, the quad dorms are problematic, as they have to be brought up to code.

Raymond asked about the recent financial email sent by President Hill and the source of the 60 staffing cuts. According to Mrs. Eismeier, the objective is to look at vacant positions, freezing them and filling them internally. This process takes a long time as it is a constantly changing picture, and they have a long way to go. Mrs. Kitzinger stated that the goal would be to gain savings through voluntary attrition.

Town Houses raised a concern about the lack of student voice involved in the process and the frustration that students felt. According to Mrs. Kitzinger, unfortunately, there are very few ways for students to get involved. She suggested working with departments, especially through the majors committees. Town Houses also raised concern that while staff had been fired in the spring, the college still hired more security guards and wondered how students could place input into decisions like these. Mrs. Eismeier suggested going before, or joining, CCL and talking to Dean Rolke. Most importantly she suggested finding the person in charge and going directly to them.

2010 proposed ACDC as a sight for a 24 hour study sight. According to Mrs. Eismeier, Maureen King was interested in using ACDC as a rehearsal space, but it would require hiring student workers. Mrs. Kitzinger mentioned some logistical problems with ACDC, such as a lack of V-print.

2012 raised concerns about the closing of Baldwin during the evening. According to Mrs. Eismeier, this was a decision that had been in conversation for years and was sped up by the financial situation. Mrs. Kitzinger also raised the point that the quality of care had been under scrutiny for years and that the college wanted to make sure that students received proper care.

Town Houses asked about the plans to move the bookstore off campus. Mrs. Eismeier said that there was no immediate plan and that the funds had been diverted to higher level projects.

4. Allocation of \$5000 from Council Discretionary to Community Shuttle

The VP of Finance moved to allocate \$5000 to help finance the Vassar Community Shuttle. The shuttle program was implemented with the intent of improving interaction with the community. Over the past few semesters, they have been experimenting with a variety of routes, keeping detailed stats on ridership. They finally settled on the current schedule, one half hour loop that works regularly during the week was found to be the most efficient way to get downtown, to field work and to the train station. In addition to the weekday shuttle, a weekend shuttle was established with a different route including the galleria and the grocery store.

The original funding was provided by the college as part of offsetting extra academic costs. The weekend shuttle, however, is not a part of the academic lives of most students and is in danger of losing funding. The Community Advisory Committee hoped that VSA could help maintain the weekend service. The shuttle on average costs \$400 a day, during the week, and \$500 a day, during the weekend. Last semester ridership averaged 120 passengers each weekend.

In the future, they are hoping that the bus system of either the town or the county, could be integrated into the current system, allowing free transportation to Vassar students with their v-cards. Right now, it seems more likely that the county would adopt the bus route, however, the process is very slow and political.

Activities inquired why the county was interested and not the city. He was informed that the city and the county bus lines overlap and the county system is currently larger and able to handle the students better.

2011 wanted to know the rationale behind the number \$5000 and how much of the

semester budget would this cover. The co-chair responded that this was approximately one half of the budget.

Raymond commended them for the consolidation, as using the bus system allowed for easier integration into the Poughkeepsie community. It was noted that this would not only benefit students, but community members who wished to easily visit Vassar without having to worry about parking.

Jewett played the fiscally conservative card asking, what happens if this doesn't pass? He was told that this could end the weekend shuttle if Cappy chose not to fund it. Main then asked if this was one time payment, or would they be back. They were hoping that it would pass through the city and be integrated, thus relieving the college of the financial burden. THs wondered where this money would come from, and was informed that it would be through a lump payment at integrated into tuition.

Lathrop wondered if there was a current bus route nearby that could be modified to enter campus. The only one serving the needs of students was a very long route that didn't even stop at the train station or the Galleria.

2011 made a motion to amend the allocation and give the community shuttle \$10,000, however finance pointed out that only \$5,000 could be given at any time and the motion was withdrawn.

All were in favor and the motion passed.

5. Announcements

a. Open Positions

Operations made a motion to declare open

b. Fines

The motion was tabled until the next meeting.

6. Reports

a. President

The VSA President announced that there would be a trustee forum on finances this Sunday in UpC. She emphasized the importance of the community showing up for the event as these issues will be affecting everyone at the college.

Meet Me In Poughkeepsie, year 2, is rapidly approaching and the President reminded everyone to get applications in quickly. The exec board hopes that 40 organizations and over 1,000 people will get off campus.

Freshmen elections are right around the corner as well, with filing beginning September 15th and elections in the end of September. She encouraged council to seek out interested freshmen and get them involved.

The VSA Exec Board has been working to bring food back to the Atrium and maintain the quality of food for all students.

Academics has been working to keep lines of communication open with the students while the curriculum keeps changing.

The President has also been working with Operations to examine the committee structure as well as devise a training strategy for students sitting on committees. She noted that in the past students have been ignored because they don't know the whole picture and the context for the conversation.

Finally, she announced that the Arlington Street Fair would be September 26th and would, once again, feature the Chili contest.

b. Operations

The VP of Operations declared that his largest challenge will be committee structure, but that he has been making progress with the dean of the college division. He has been meeting with a lot of people, a lot.

This year Operations is pursuing the noble goal of making sure students have all the

facts on the VSA Council's activities. He recently launched, with the help of his new webmaster Eric, the VSA website. Which, he bragged, is far better than those of our peer institutions. One aspect of the new website was a guide to Poughkeepsie compiled from various sources, including 101 Things to Do In Poughkeepsie and the Miscellany News.

Operations also noted that he is working with CIS to establish a 24 hour work room in the Old Faculty Parlor and that it should be up and running in the next few weeks.

Lathrop asked if there was any way to merge the field work office with the CDO and inquired if Rocky Hall was a viable space for a 24 hour work room. The VSA President responded that this would be the admin review for the year. She also reminded Lathrop that Rocky was run by faculty and would be difficult to arrange.

7. Goals Document

The VSA President made a motion to approve the VSA goals document for the year. The theme for this year's council is "Innovate."

2011 inquired about the compost bins in the retreat. The President responded 3 of the 5 bins were damaged on arrival and will be appearing soon.

2010 asked about the Vassar/Yale formal. It was explained that this was an attempt to rekindle the old relations between Vassar and Yale, as well as celebrate 40 years of coeducation.

Raymond asked about renewing loans for international students. Council was informed that there was no way to promise this in the long run, but that a one year commitment could be made. Raymond also asked about President Hill's forums. The VSA President said that Cappy wants to hold this in the upcoming months to allow for transparency in the administration.

All were in favor and the motion passed.

8. Appointment of Lindsey Andon to Noyes Secretary

The VP of Operations moved to appoint Lindsey Andon to Noyes Secretary. All were in favor and the motion passed.

9. Appointment of Michael Mestitz to Noyes Treasurer

The VP for Operations moved to appoint Michael Mestitz to Noyes Treasurer. All were in favor and the motion passed.

10. Declaration of Four Open Positions on Board of Elections

Operations moved to declare open all positions on the board of elections. All were in favor and the motion passed.

11. Athletics Proposal

Student Life made a motion to endorse a document recommending that Varsity Athletes be allowed to receive half a credit for their involvement in a varsity sport. This would allow the work of Varsity athletes to be recognized as part of their learning experience and would be counted in lieu of their physical education credits.

2012 argued that Varsity sports were exclusive and therefore should not be allowed to be counted as credit. She was reminded that many departments, such as drama, have audition requirements and are allowed to count their classes as credit.

Cushing wondered if there would be an academic element attached to the sports, such as a paper. The President responded that no, but that while the learning was not in a traditional academic sense, it was still present and very important. In addition, this proposal would help both athletes and non-athletes, by allowing the former to manage their schedules and grating the latter more room in classes.

2013 asked what the facilitation classes consisted of, and why these credits would not be offered to Freshmen. The President informed him that the classes taught valuable life

lessons such as collaboration, leadership and strategy. The option to elect the sport as a class would only be open to students who had played the sport for at least a year. This would prevent freshmen from arriving and adding a sport to ease up credit requirements.

Strong raised concerns that this could set a precedent allowing for club sports and organizations to gain credit. Academics reminded her that it is impossible to say how much time is put into a club sport or organization and that there is no overhead supervision. As a result, only Varsity sports could be offered credit. TH's pointed out that a varsity sport is a far larger commitment than any organization, or even many classes.

Lathrop introduced the idea of adding more credit to other large commitment courses, such as science. Activities seemed to like this idea.

The two SAC representatives, Alistair and Laura reminded council that this was voluntary and was in no way a trailblazing idea; many peer institutions have already adopted similar policies.

TSs made a motion to amend the language of one sentence. All were in favor and the motion passed.

The final motion was brought to vote, Davison and Strong were opposed, all others were in favor and the motion passed.

12. Addition to Article IV, Section 25 of the VSA Bylaws

Activities made a motion to propose a series of changes to the VSA Bylaws that would require VSA organizations going off-campus for an overnight event, to register with the VP for Activities 4 weeks in advance, and would require the approval of council. The intent of the change was to hold students responsible for their actions when they served as representatives of Vassar College in the larger community.

2013 questioned the need for registering 4 weeks before the event, while 2011 worried that this might be over-regulating and overburdening the VSA Orgs. 2011 proposed an amendment to change "4 weeks" to "2 weeks." Activities responded that 4 weeks was necessary to allow organizations planning time and the ability to come before council twice, if rejected the first time. The amendment was withdrawn.

THs worried that this could limit and stifle short term events and wondered if there was a way to work this idea into the current approval system. Activities pointed out that there is no current system of regulation and that something like this has never been proposed before.

It was decided to table the motion until the next meeting.

13. Open Discussion

2010 announced that there were "many more months" until graduation.

Operations announced that several open committee positions needed to be filled by members of council. These committees were: Arlington Special Events, filled by Lathrop; Academic Technology, filled by Joss, TAs and Davison; Admissions and Financial Aid, filled by 2012; College Life Resource Group, filled by Ferry; and Disabilities Committee, filled by Noyes.

The President made a motion to change the VSA council meeting time to 8:30, as a conflict had arisen for one council member. Academics argued that this would set a bad precedent for making council a secondary commitment. Activities added that council had been at 7:00 on Sundays for years. A paper ballot was held and the motion failed.