

VASSAR STUDENT ASSOCIATION

Council Agenda for February 1, 2015

Time: 7:00pm

Location: College Center 223

"Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced." – James Baldwin

1 Call to Order

Start: 7:02

2 Attendance.....Operations

2015: Proxy

Ferry: Proxy

Town Students: Absent

3 Consensus Agenda

a. Minutes From 12/7/14

President: Assuming no one distraught by what was said and wants to take it back, we're going to assume it's approved.

4 Welcome Back and Thoughts On The New SemesterPresident (10 min)

President: I hope everyone had restful break, last semester stuff started to heat up and important stuff came to light that will still be continuing throughout the rest semester, so we will definitely be taking about that. I want to open up space to bring up anything related to that, that you wanted to make sure carried over to this semester, or new thoughts or goals to put out for semester. Does anyone have anything? Okay, so we will move on. If anyone has anything feel free to shout it out anytime.

Student Life: So, one thing we as VSA should put legwork into this semester, concerning the recent Margolis Healy report, is to define what we mean by an open campus. It is a trickier question then it initially appears to be, deciding what our rules should be having people on campus. The signs on gates predate the people who work here, they say open hours are from 7am-10pm, and if you are not on campus during those hours you are carded. The official policy used to say that walking around during closed hours got you carded, but they changed that protocol to only if you are breaking regulations. Do we want this to extend inside or keep it in the physically outside space, what are clear protocol that we can give to Safety and Security to make sure there is a set of regulations if people are stopped, if they ought to be stopped, stuff like that. How do we look at the question of an open campus given the fact that the size of our Safety and Security force is half of what it was 6 years ago, maybe less. We have very few cameras, and there's been a push to add more, but also student backlash despite the fact that most other college campuses have better video surveillance than us. We have a camera over the yogurt in the Retreat because people were stealing yogurt, but not on bike racks or in front of dorm rooms and buildings, which is something, in my opinion, that is pretty irresponsible. So more conversations about what we mean. This addresses issues critical to campus climate, and I see it as something where our voice can be used to work towards producing a set of regulations that serve as a solution to a big and thorny issue. I will be working on it in Student Life, and I extend the invite to all, to help us figure out what an open campus means.

Finance: Two things, first, sort of related to what we mean by an open campus, I have a friend, he is a member of the Poughkeepsie community, and he used to be able to use the pool, but after the

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renovation we stopped people in the community from having access to the pool and gym area, which makes sense because we pay for it and want to make sure it stays nice, but in considering Vassar as a community resource to people in the Poughkeepsie community, we need to have a discussion with ourselves before we have one with administration about what we feel comfortable with as an open campus, whether or not we want people here using campus and enjoying the beauty of this freezing hellscape, or using the gym, this campus as a public space, obviously not giving people swipe access, but I think answer is yes. Second, in a conversation we had early in the year, I want to retract something I said. I've meditated on it, and I've come to the conclusion that what I said wrong. In seeking out information about the endowment, regardless that it is very available if you seek it out and accessible in the idea that everything is published, if you take time and bring it to a professor or econ major to explain it to you, but that is not great in terms of people understanding finances. So I've appointed someone from my committee to communicate so that we have a way for students to field concerns about having access to information and understanding the information we have access to. He will be putting together one page on the endowment, the basics, where our money is. I think people should be more implicated.

Student Life: Tagging on to the last update, when deciding on an open campus especially within certain hours, how to look at examples of events that happened in past, racial profiling but also the homo-hop that happened until it didn't, where many people that didn't go to Vassar knew students would be in altered states and there was lots of predatory behavior, so stuff like that. And events like people going to concerts in Skinner, which the community goes to all the time, versus spring concert, and all campus parties.

At-large: One thing I noticed about financial information is that there is no consistency. For example we still don't have the IRS 990 from this past year, and it has been well over 6 months.

Finance: Because of cutbacks they are still putting that together, but they don't publish what they've sent to the IRS, because we want to make sure we provide something more accessible. I will contact Stephen and ask him about consistency in posting.

President: Feel free to bring stuff up later on. First semester was about learning our roles, and now you should feel like you can take agency to bring stuff up. There are 24 people on this council and every person should feel like taking initiative. That is part of why you're here.

5 Title IX SurveyStudent Life (15 min)

Student Life: As you may have heard, I have been working very closely with the Title IX and SAVP folks here crafting a survey, called a campus climate survey by the federal government. It is legally required, part Title IX, and had to be done before 2016/17, but we are doing it this year, it is done, we crafted it and I think I can say with confidence that it is better than all of the other campus climate surveys I've seen. Now the big issue, now we are going to focus on testing it. One of the groups we are interested in testing it with is the VSA, so I need volunteers. We are looking for a range of class years, genders, a

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range of all kind of things for a diverse mix of people to give feedback on this thing. Unfortunately it is not the kind of feedback where we can re-craft the entire thing, but to ask questions like "why didn't you include this thing" because the biggest way for a survey to fail is to not have an option for people to express themselves. So it is done, comprehensive, and probably going to be super triggering. It is optional, and there will be a button that allows you to leave the page at anytime. It is anonymous and we mean anonymous. We spent a really long time deciding what questions we weren't allowed to ask because if it gives too much information we are legally obligated to investigate. The date for the VSA focus group to take and look at the survey, give feedback on it, is not tomorrow but the following Monday. Monday February 9th, in the evening sometime. Possibly the VSA might help pay for incentives for focus group members, \$5 v-cash and a slice pizza. We've been working really really hard, all across the northeast, and I had the fun experience of being the only student involved in our consortium crafting it and having to speak for all students when certain questions were raised. If you would like to be involved, email either my personal or Student Life email. We will probably take it Monday at 7 or 8. Any questions about it? It's going to effect, everyone is getting sent it, and it will probably cause outrage.

Operations: Clarifying question, for the focus groups, in terms of data collection, what, my concern with opt-in focus groups, is how the data will be interpreted if it is self-selecting.

Student Life: So we are not trying to collect data, you will not fill it out and turn it in, because that wouldn't be anonymous. We are not asking that you do it, but asking to look it over. The logic in picking the VSA is that everyone has their own constituents, so we're asking people to be like "woah woah why did you choose to use this word", or "there is no option to indicate x event and I feel students deserve the option of x event". No data will be collected until we send out the online form, and there will be lots of skip logic. We want people to be able to see everything, so we are going to print it. Also we might pay other institutions to post our survey. We are not asking you to fill it out, just look it over, get sets of eyes on it, and we will have other groups as well such as CARES, and we've reached out to the ALANA and LBGQT centers, and athletics. David really wants a group that is randomly selected, but I don't know how willing the average student is to sit in a room for 60-90 minutes and go point by point about sex assault, stalking, interpersonal violence, that kind of thing.

Cushing: Two questions, one, who was in the consortium besides you and is there a reason there were no other students, or did you... I know you were working with the Student Life committee...

Student Life: We crafted this over the past semester, and, Renee wanted to keep the group small. The consortium, it was HEDS, was hosted by Wesleyan, Bryn Mawr, Tufts, Colby, Bates, a bunch of colleges across the northeast, and we're involved in another that I didn't go to physical meetings with, I don't think there were any. There was that, and we also looked to other surveys, like the MIT survey. Why no other students? I am going to get all democratic, when I was elected, it was expected that I put in work for this subject area, and I think that is what I've done, I'm sure there were ways we could've included

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more students, but this has been a weekly thing for the past semester, Renee, Charlotte, Kelly David, really it was just four people sometimes, and after Charlotte joined us, five of us, but no other students.

Cushing: Can I ask another question? Are the results going to be published or are they just for the college, like what are we using this for, and how will the results be useful for us as a college? Will administration take this into account when changing policies?

Student Life: The value is for Charlotte especially, because if, one, it will show if the statistics of a certain population have certain higher rates than others, which can help justify, anecdotally, if people are aware of higher rates, if we can see it in writing and have data that says a certain population is at risk, it would justify more targeted outreach and more mandated outreach to certain groups. Maybe 50% of students say they've practiced bystander intervention, then what we are doing is good but maybe we could be doing more. We will also be sharing and comparing with other institutions, and I'm pretty sure it will be public. I can't think of a reason why it wouldn't be, and I know we have to turn it in to the government. It definitely will be used by Charlotte to see how most effectively she can do her job.

Strong: Do you have, I would really appreciate it, if you could send out a quick email to all of us, to remind us, I don't know if this is too much to ask, just a reminder if you want to do this, to email you.

Student Life: Yeah, yeah I can send out an email.

Finance: Who's interpreting the data collected?

Student Life: Probably David, the Director of Institutional Research.

Finance: What does that mean? What are his qualifications?

Student Life: He is our data guy on campus, every data thing on campus is David or under David.

Basically, it is Charlotte, Kelly, Julian, myself, and Renee has stayed on because she started it. David is the data guy, and he is more than qualified to do things with data.

Finance: Thank you for all of your work.

Student Life: I feel like it might make people very upset, but we have to do it, and we should do it soon and do it right, which is what we tried to do.

President: One more question. Is there anything in place to deal with the triggering content?

Student Life: It will be emailed to the entire student body, so everyone has it. I am pretty sure CARES is going to be on high alert.

President: Are people going to be made super aware beforehand that it may be triggering?

Student Life: Yes, there are blocks of text, saying you can leave anytime, and click out. It is going to ask questions about sexual assault, stalking, and dating violence, which are topics that can be really really triggering for people. Luckily, it is an online thing, so you are able to take it with a computer in a more private setting, which is better than getting handed paper and having to fill out paper in a room of people. Yeah, all kinds of warnings.

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a. Activities.....(7 min)

Activities: So, this next month is full of preliminary orgs, and next week we will move level 3 pre-orgs to org status. Some of them. And then, we are going to put out a survey, not a survey, but a fill out form of new pre-orgs for next semester, and there will be a pre-org fair at the beginning of March. Part of the problem with pre-orgs is that no one knows what they are and how to join them, so that is part of the reason why they do not have enough people, and have failed in the past.

b. Academics.....(7 min)

Academics: Hi everyone, so some updates. The former director of fieldwork retired at the end of the past semester, so we now have an interim director, Nick De Leeuw, for the next 18 months to keep the office going and for steering where that office is headed, and how learning through doing things, experiential learning, how that is going to look in the future at Vassar, and how it works with the CDO and Fellowships offices. He will be instrumental in that. The library director search is still going. We started reviewing applications today. There are 35 applications, and it is going well. Hopefully we will have a director in place by the end of the semester. The syllabus archive is coming along, it has already been approved, so now it will have to be created physically by a person in the library who does digital things. And then, what we will be working on this semester is the majors fair, which will happen the first week of April in the Villard room. Also, student seminars are usually in the month of April, so we will start working on those soon and have people apply to teach them. Those will all be happening soon.

7 Introduction of Council Updates President (5 min)

President: Two quick things that I decided to implement for our council family and friends. Wherever you place yourself in that group. So we will start doing council updates. If you look at past minutes, they used to have all house presidents report out, similar to exec reports. Two or three people go a week, and people will probably not have to go more than twice a semester. You can talk about events or specific things in your constituencies, because lots of times those things don't get shared. There has been a lack of sharing and communication. They will be quick, five minutes tops, and you can say whatever you want. I wanted to do it as a way to get everyone more involved.

8 (Re)introduction of Constituent Concerns President (5 min)

President: Last year, they did constituent concerns, which was similar to open discussion. It was for specific things constituents brought forth to you that they were concerned about, and we got a lot of good initiatives from it last year. For example, the light bulbs in senior housing issue, that would be something the senior housing person would bring up. It is just sort of a space to be more focused and open to general discussion, and it tends to be more fun and less focused. I will make up a schedule and send it out so you all know when you are going.

9 Open Discussion

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Finance: Four things. First, I want to say that the block party in Main was a really good idea. It is good to have stuff like that available, because it makes people feel welcome, and that is an important part of our community. Second, Cathy, the finance intern, has left, so she's being replaced by Joshua Temporo and he will be taking over her responsibilities. You may remember him as the person who tied with Lauren. He's been on finance, and it will be easy for him to transition into the position. Third, the reshuffling of staff positions, which is when they fire people and don't hire someone else, is beginning to directly affect us. The controller's office has been downsized, reshuffled, so now there is only one person working there, so it will take at minimum three weeks to get checks. So I'm really trying to get the word out, because if someone brings a form in for that week, they are not going to get a check, and I need to make sure people are prepared. You need paperwork in three weeks in advance, and there is really no wiggle room here. There is literally one person typing stuff into a computer. It is a lot of work, and it is frustrating to them to have to be accommodating to all of the people who are not organized. Last, I was thinking a lot about the idea of public service at Vassar. I think there are lots of orgs on campus, which I generally divide as orgs for the community, or for fun for themselves. I think a little of both offer a learning experience, and they are important to the student body. Someone who embodies that is Casey Hancock, who has left and is now exploring exciting business adventures. Yes, he is going to be famous, and if they make a movie about him I promise you the VSA will be in it. He was on council for two years, worked on the finance committee, and did a tremendous service to finance. We did not get along for most of that time, but without him I don't know where we'd be. He entirely revolutionized my position even though he was never in it, and he single handedly built the dashboard. We are the only school of our peers to have that software, and there is a turnaround time that no one else has. It also means that we know more about where our money is going and how it is used, and that is huge. I think he did a great service to our community. But he is not here. So yeah, for those of you who knew him while he was a student here, he might be back, you guys should definitely send him a message saying good luck and congrats. He really did contribute a lot, and he stuck around even when he was not in a position, which really means a lot.

Operations: Some very quick updates, the BOEA is doing appointments for open positions, which are Jewett Sophomore rep, Strong Vice President, and the CCL 2015 rep.

Finance: Also the class of 2016 treasurer.

Operations: Abby Johnson will be planning the election timeline for spring elections, and we will present that to council next week, Abby will present it. Third, there has been a rumor that the report is in from the external review, but that is not true. We have been in touch, and that is probably a month out.

Joss: Something you might want to tell to operations, we don't have a junior rep.

Jewett: If an org wants to run a floor for the Seven Deadly Sins event, which will be February 27th, we will give you \$50.

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Student Life: So, part of what I feel is the VSA's duty, is to distill some of the rage of the student body into pragmatic policy suggestions. So, I'm sure all of you are trying your hardest to figure out what we do now, and I am looking forward to working with all of you and I know you care deeply, on using the special organizational knowledge we have to help shape some of the hurt and anger coming out of the student body. Like, the petition to fire Cappy and Chris, which some of you have signed. I'm not going to address that specifically, but it is a sign that something ought be done, and there are quite a few some things we as the VSA can do. We have knowledge of who does what, and how things work structurally, and if you're not up on those things by now I encourage you to research. For example, something that really bothered me was the tizzy about the definition of consent, and that it was a new thing, and that was actually a rumor. We know what the rules are here, and know which administrators do what, how to use that administrator, reasons why policies are in place, to help our constituents, because, Vassar is organizationally a labyrinth. It does so much to be able to say, "actually the reason this is this is because this happened, under this office". Knowing how this place works is super important for all of us to do to come up with policy changes. Something else I think is needed is a politic of love. A greater sense of people taking care of each other. Some of the major criticisms students have is that they don't feel supported, cared for, but what if we all cared for each other? That doesn't let everyone off the hook, but I don't feel like the popular thing is to say, "what if we were kind to each other?" I think that is a powerful thing, especially in this place. I remember when Reuben stepped down, and someone said, "I don't care if your job is harder right now", which is a really terrible thing to say. So, making things like that unthinkable. Actively supporting each other, communicating in a way that is not based on who can prove that their politics are better but extending open arms and willingness to help and educate. The reason I am rambling to you folks is, we are student leaders, and modeling behaviors is our job. Promoting a greater politic of care for each other is something I think would improve this place a lot.

Cushing: I wanted to ask, first of all, Emily Platt wrote an article on Boilerplate about the consent policy thing, I don't know what to call it, but it was very informative, and you should send it to your constituents. I want to ask if anyone knows, everyone is so confused, and all we have is Emily's article that explains things, so should we talk to our constituents about it? Because what we said to our freshmen about the consent policy was what was written on the SAVP page, "active sober verbal", but should we talk to constituents? I don't know, I feel like we should, maybe it should come from a place that is not the VSA specifically. Like talking to the SAVP coordinator, to have her explain all of this would be really great. I personally could talk to Charlotte. My house team very confused.

Student Life: So, I think the question of confusion is an interesting one. There is the definition of consent that is normatively good, and the definition of consent that is legally possible. It is good to promote the definition of an "active sober yes," and that should still be something that is taught in houses, but I don't think it is a legally enforceable policy. I've had a lot of consensual drunk sex, and

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any policy that says anytime someone is kind of drunk is automatically assault is legally unenforceable and confusing, and stuff like that. I encourage students to read the handbook, but I don't see the problem with promoting something that is a good definition to have. The more clearly we can set standards the better, especially for first year students who have never heard the word consent before. But letting everyone know this is what it looks like... you know what it looks like. Trying to pin it down with words is just an effort to convince people who might not regularly respect peoples bodies. I think sexual assault is a pretty obvious thing, and trying to connect words to it is less consequential to me. Jewett: Most people on this campus view the SAVP office as the official group that deals with that stuff, so when it is not made explicitly clear that it is an ideal, people can get really confused. It is important to say, this is not the college policy, but what we should strive for, but this is what the college policy is.

Student Life: So you want me to go to the SAVP office, and say we need a more nuanced consent talk that speaks about the ideals and normative goods but maybe a little about Title IX and why policies are the way they are?

Jewett: We have all seen that graphic, and people think it is the official thing. Spring Training for House Team was the first time I heard that this is just an ideal.

2018: I'm scared that if we continue to do what we did, and what happened to Ellie happens to a bunch of others... Students don't know the real definition, and when someone, if someone, is sexually assaulted and they have that definition in their head and expect the person who sexually assaulted them to have the right punishment, it is really terrible to be told, "Oh that wasn't the right definition". It needs to be more public, so students know, and if you just tell students to go read the handbook, they're going to forget to read the handbook.

2017: Would it help if the VSA worked with SAVP to construct a very easy to understand script, a video with Charlotte explaining the terms and processes on the SAVP webpage, so when people are looking for this information they have it explained by the people in charge of it? Having major terms and policies mentioned, something like that is a lot easier to communicate the nuances than perhaps a brochure or handbook or text on a webpage.

Student Life: That is definitely something Student Life can do. I'm rethinking this, especially what 2018 said, but I think, I'm confused with the idea of students being confused about what sexual assault is and looks like. Students on this campus know what assault is, and I think the Title IX process is a results-based thing, and sometimes people are traumatized by the results of their hearings. Definitely, making policies and definitions clearer is always a good thing, but I don't buy that the student body is like, "I got two definitions of sexual assault so now I don't know which one is true." I think it is very clear what it looks like. A sober yes, we should continue to tell people that it is sober. But do I think most people on campus have had consensual non-sober sex? Yes! But I'm confused about the idea that because the legal definition we use is marginally different from the best practices we teach, that students

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don't understand what sexual assault is. I don't buy it. I feel like it is students looking to find concrete reasons to be mad at administration, more ammo in their arsenal. I don't buy it.

Finance: Maybe this is wrong, not correct, but sexual interactions between individuals, there are weird societal institutional constructs that exist, and students come to school and have experiences that are confusing, anxiety inducing, and upsetting, and I don't think it is clear. There are instances when people have been sexually assaulted and don't come to that conclusion until later. It is upsetting and confusing, and needs a lot of work. I liked what 2017 said. We need to brainstorm ideas, and we need to make sure people have access to information and are not getting eight different definitions of consent. Not everyone comes here with a sexual vocabulary, and it is too confusing. We have been getting that for years, to read the handbook. It is BS.

Cushing: The reason why I brought this up, my student fellows have been asking us, me and other people, how to talk to fellowees. Another thing we did was a house meeting, and one of the question I got was, "really, we have to say it?" I had a lot of questions, and the answers we gave were what SAVP has on the website. I also think if a victim goes to report, if they think that it is one policy, when they get there, and when they then realize it is actually case-by-case... someone who goes through that process goes through so much, and getting a response of rejection, that is so much worse than maybe being able to see whether they should report and go through the process or not. Being rejected by Title IX fucks with people's brains. I always think people's bodies aren't institutionalized, but that is what we have here and what we have in the world, and there has to be something legal about it. I think we can do it, I don't think it is that hard.

2017: I also wanted to speak to the confusion of Student Life. I don't think people who are worried are worried that they won't know what sexual assault is, but that they'll decide to report it with a misunderstanding of what they have to prove. To undertake that traumatic process and have to understand that they are working under a stricter definition than they thought, that is the problem a lot of people are seeing.

Joss: To go back to what Student Life said earlier, in pushing an idealistic message, part of me can't stomach that. Posters everywhere that say one thing. I think the issue of confusion is less about definitions but the pretenses of going to report these things. And maybe this is going too far, but pushing a message like what the posters say, "active sober verbal", is an emotional safety net, and is leading a lot of people on, which is something I am really uncomfortable with.

Student Life: So a question for the broader group. Should we put emphasis on Title IX and reporting, should that be something we shift campus dialogue to? The posters are all SAVP. SAVP doesn't really touch on the reporting process. All of that goes through Title IX. The definition SAVP has and uses, that is for survivor support, affirmation, and encouraging people to reach out to counseling or CARES. It is an entirely separate entity from the justice process. While I hear everything that you are saying, and I am going to move forward to make things abundantly clear, I don't want us to change the way

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survivors are supported emotionally, and bend it around the legal process of Title IX. It is a broad ideal definition coming out of survivor support services, and I am uncomfortable molding to a system beholden to Title IX that is under United States law. We need to recognize the ways in which the Title IX process involved people like Kelly Grab, and does not work with SAVP at all. They are pretty separate, and changing too much language in an effort to get people going through the process is a calculated move, one we should take, but recognizing that shit is separate.

President: I just want to say, you can change committees this semester. You have to remain on two, but you can switch it up.

Student Life: And At-Large people can join any committee but Finance.

Davison: Motion to adjourn.