

# VASSAR STUDENT ASSOCIATION

## Council Minutes for November 11, 2012

"I believe we can seize this future together because we are not as divided as our politics suggests. We're not as cynical as the pundits believe. We are greater than the sum of our individual ambitions, and we remain more than a collection of red states and blue states. We are and forever will be the United States of America. "  
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- 1 Call to Order
  - The meeting was called to order at 7 p.m.
- 2 Attendance.....Operations
  - All here, 2016 proxy, Town Student was unable to find a proxy.
- 3 Consent Agenda
  - a. \$3914 from the Speakers, Lectures and Panels Fund to Improv
  - b. \$810 from the Capital Fund to SASA
  - c. \$400 from the Collaboration Fund to SASA
  - d. \$1000 from the Speakers, Lectures, and Panels Fund to Squirim
  - e. \$825 from the Collaboration Fund to Ballroom
  - f. \$305 from the Conference Fund to Quidditch
  - g. \$315 from the Conference Fund to Greens
  - h. \$108.65 from the Capital Fund to FWA
  - i. \$500 from the Collaboration Fund to FWA
  - j. \$1200 from the Capital Fund to VISA
  - k. \$50 from the Capital Fund to Wordsmiths
  - All adopted.
- 4 Forum with Jonathan Chenette, Dean of the Faculty.....(60 min)
  - He will speak in 4 segments:
    1. Staffing the 2013-2014 curriculum: They have 1150 courses this year. On Oct. 1<sup>st</sup> the chairs send proposals for what to offer next year. Those courses included 35 additional courses to what we have now. He can't approve all of these because that would mean 7 extra faculty members. His committee asks about the rationales for the course, ask the chairs questions, respond to curricular needs, look closely at enrollment pressures, and work with faculty to reschedule leaves. The last few years the number of class sections has remained steady. They plan to do this while the budget remains the same. They are lucky to have the size of faculty they have, but growth doesn't seem likely.
    2. JYA: 59% of the junior class is gone. A lot more budgeted this year, but they need even more. 20 extra students went away which is equivalent to 40 extra semesters. The budget impact is \$650K that goes to sending these extra students and \$200K of lost room and board revenue. This is about the size of the faculty raise for next year. They've been trying to figure out why this

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increase occurred, if this is a blip or something they need to plan. They put together a long list of things they need to do, options include limiting full year JYA approvals, emphasizing approval w/ ability to pay (commitment to financial aid), emphasizing academic rationale, increasing full pay visiting students, returning to faculty approved criteria (3.2 GPA and academic rationale), exceptions approved by CLP. The Committee on Leaves and Privileges was using different criteria that wasn't actually approved, and may have caused this huge spike.

3. Grade Inflation: HERI Faculty Survey. 35.5% of Vassar faculty "strongly agree", 65% somewhat agree that grade inflation is negatively contributing to Vassar students' learning. 3.1 was the average graduating GPA in 1989 and now it's a little over 3.5. Vassar is number one on lists of peer institutions that have the highest GPAs. There are a few approaches to this, one of which is doing nothing. UNC Chapel Hill gives annotated transcripts to show relationship to other students in the class and cumulative GPA for the classes they're taking. Wellesley gives median grade cap for large lower level courses. Princeton limits A to A- to a fixed percent of class. Grades can also be replaced by words to move out of preconceived notions.

-Cushing asked about whether there's been other research on grade inflation, does it vary between departments? The percentage of science majors is below average at Vassar, so yes it does. Each department can see the statistics in their area.

-Dave clarified that the Misc. article mentioned was an opinion piece.

-Socos asked about if there's a correlation between the college getting more competitive and students getting better grades because perhaps better caliber students come in. He thinks this is a possibility, but not the sole reason for grade inflation.

-Activities asked if limiting the number of As would take away from learning because students would be striving for the A instead of learning. He thinks students are motivated in different ways, some by grades and some not at all. He thinks maybe young faculty feel pressure by the CEQs to give better grades.

-Student Life asked about how students feel about their grades. He made some hilarious jokes and all were merry.

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-Justin asked if annotated transcripts could be an option, what the feedback has been. Dean Chenette most favors doing this. It would take a little while to get it done technologically.

-Josh asked if there's a plan to have an open discussion with students and faculty. There's no faculty discussion schedules now, but there have been low level discussions for the past four years where they created proposals etc. He thinks that if we did instate any of these changes it would necessitate a bigger discussion. He doesn't see anything happening in the near future, but maybe in the next few years.

-Jewett asked if he thinks they will propose this to the student body in any way. They need to think about how employers will view these transcripts. Reed is an interesting example. They use grades, but they don't put them out there.

-Lathrop talked about her high school giving words instead of grades. She wonders if words would mean anything to future employers; he noted most schools would probably change the words to numbers anyway for employers. The idea is that this system would re-norm things.

-Raymond thinks we need to focus on a healthy academic environment. She feels people are relatively individually motivated instead of an atmosphere of peer pressure here and she's nervous that a change could disrupt the balance of this academic environment. She also noted the system of a school that deemphasizes grades by giving comments and sending grades. Dean Chenette heard students say they think they didn't deserve the A.

4. Curriculum: Correlates have increased from 0 to 38. Majors have increased too. Ratio of number of majors awarded to number of graduates 1.03 in 1970 and is now 1.21. The correlate growth has seen an even more dramatic growth. There were 29 different majors in 1970, 21 required senior thesis or projects, 72% of majors. Now there are 51 different majors. The core proposal talks about Vassar students deserving our commitment to prepare them for extraordinary accomplishments as seniors. This proposal challenges them to bring together everything they've learned. A thesis or project gives you something to be proud of, and are passionate about. The goal is to "extend the benefits of such transformative senior work to every Vassar student". He thinks this close work between faculty and students is something that Vassar does well and one of the best experiences we provide.

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They encourage active learning, lots of time on a specific test, and lots of individual student/faculty time. He thinks they can bring it to every aspect of your education. The faculty will have a discussion about this this Wednesday. It's time to think about questions, see how much support there is to make this a requirement, and add incentives/rewards to students and faculty.

-2013 asked about faculty overloading. The idea is that faculty could use their teaching credits as counting advising senior work. If this is a major requirement then this would be more of a problem in departments with smaller faculty/student ratios. Phase one he's talked about is trying to envision engaging/exciting senior work, the second phase is questioning whether or not it's desirable, and the third phase would be practical issues of instating it. Do people view it as desirable enough to make it a requirement?

-Dave asked if given the increased strain on faculty and the college's limited budget, how would they create a balance between faculty time commitment and instating this project. Moving from 34 to 32 credits for graduation would reduce the amount of courses/people enrolled to reduce strain on faculty. The practicalities haven't been discussed in too much depth yet. They need to ensure that there's less pressure on courses overall, that students are accustomed to sustained engagement in a topic. They also need to make sure students are prepared by demanding course work, etc.

-Student life made a motion to extend time by 20 minutes and this passed with all in favor.

-President asked why some departments require theses or why it's optional in some departments. The rationale was that not all of the students were ready to do it. At the time he asked why certain students weren't ready. Members of CCP were in favor of dropping this requirement. A downside to this is that some departments feel like some students choose not to major in a department because they don't have to do a thesis.

-2014 asked about the number of majors requiring senior work. It's about 60% of students that do a capstone project.

-2015 asked what they're looking at in terms of a timeline. What kind of research are they planning on doing? He's done a lot of the research. He thinks it makes sense here, but they need to be creative about the range of things they cover with this idea. He thinks other schools who have made this

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change will be informative when they need to solve the instances of double majors, crediting with faculty, helping students get ready, etc. The timeline is whenever it happens which may be never.

-Activities asked if asking for senior work would discourage people double majoring. He loves the idea of some type of senior work that combines two majors instead of discouraging multidisciplinary approaches.

-Operations asked about correlates and if the senior work would have to do with this. He noted that he’s not necessarily looking at it having to do with majors, but just some type of senior work. She also asked if this senior work would require other less strict structures in other aspects of majors.

-Josh asked about this decision coming from administrators of individual departments. Ultimately these types of decision are implemented through departments, but there are pressures that require collaboration.

-Joss asked if there are any changes that will be made while Dean Chenette is acting president. He will be approachable, accessible, and open, but not try to implement anything drastically new. There will not be any major changes to how the college is run.

-2015 thanked him for coming in and approaching this issue in this way. He feels that this is the right way of looking at it.

-Dave asked how outside forces might affect the stats in the graphs. Perhaps computers, internet, more quick accessible resources? He thinks that’s an interesting idea that he hasn’t thought of. He noted that over the last decade much of this change possibly could have been from internet advantages.

-An at large member asked about why triple majoring is considered a bad thing and could harm senior work. He said this is a conversation they haven’t had yet. It’s a question of depth and breadth. It is a question they will discuss.

### 5 Executive Board Reports

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

-Organization review is coming up. None of the houses or class presidents have to do this. They’ll do the first 53 orgs this semester and it’ll be due in November. It’ll be sent through a link on the VSA website. They are looking at Meet me in Manhattan and the Brewer Classic which is looking at athletics. They will also be evaluating the org certification process.

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-Main asked what this process entails. They will be asking who the current org members are; this doesn't mean who's on their email list.

-Jewett asked what they're trying to get out of the process. It's constitutionally mandates, it's to see if they're active, and to make decertification easier.

b. Finance.....(7 min)

-Everything is perfectly fine, except for the Speaker's Fund which they can't draw any money from. However, they can take money from other funds and put it into Speaker's Fund. They've cut money twice as many times as last year and they've had half as many complaints so they feel good about what they're doing. They can only draw 60% of any money in a fund in a semester. Have they literally reached that actual number? They can vote to move that money before voting to approve the allocation. TAs and Main are working on a project with him about creating a social consciousness fund. They are reaching out to faculty and students and orgs about this issue. They've chosen 35 orgs to reach out to work on this.

-Joss gave props to 2013 for spatially organizing the entrance room to the VSA room.

6 Resolution on Security Technology.....Student Life (15 min)

-In April he got an advance copy of the security/technology master plan. It was an outside plan that looked at how this campus organizes intrusion alarms and how security interacts with students. In VSA conversations and past conversations he's attempted to put together a series of core suggestions to give to Dean Roellke. He made a list of 6 things to send directly to the dean of the college division. What does everyone think about these core suggestions? Lights remain unrepaired outside for months, there's a dearth of blue lights on campus, and the path plan is dangerous and atrocious especially certain paths like the TH path. They think surveillance on campus is a very delicate discussion. Student Life doesn't feel prepared to take on a research discussion about this topic. Surveillance in dorms is not something students want? Is this true? Please talk to constituents.

-Justin asked if there's been any crime or instances of danger that is causing this research. A lot of this is corollary and not causation. It seems to be an industry suggestion and the people who have offered this review. It's an emergency safety feature and not something they should cut corners on. It provides a sense of security, not just a function.

-Student Life is on Monday at 7 if anyone wants to come and talk to people. 2015 asked if it'll be sent to Operations and yes it will.

-Operations noted they'd be happy to look at it, but she thinks Student Life should definitely look at it first. There are three master planning committee members that are

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students and she encourages reaching out to them. She also thinks that improving outdoor lighting should include adding lights to certain pathways that don't have lights at all  
-Finance asked if there have been any changes about new campus patrol ideas. There hasn't been a lot of follow-up discussion.

### 7 Conversation on Coursework in Social Awareness.....Academics (30 min)

-Talking about coursework is beneficial unto itself. He read from the college mission statement to illustrate the college's commitments. He thinks that coursework in social awareness is a great way to accomplish these goals. 5 goals: Represent the college taking a stance, would force people to confront ideas of privilege, broadcast the idea of being socially aware, impart a skillset of being able to talk about these issues with fluency, productive and ubiquitous. They want to step away from the simple solution of putting labels on some classes and adding it as a course requirement. They want to cast this as expanding the Vassar course of study. They would work with faculty members in each department to see how they would fill this goal. They would talk about it with students in a variety of ways, revisit their college courses (they used to have massive enrollment, but don't as much now). They are trying to discover if students want this or not, but would love to hear council's ideas first.  
-Jewett asked about how computer science or physics would fit in. They hope to create courses or move courses around in many ways.

-Josh thinks this could be a very rewarding idea, but he thinks having it as a requirement would take away form the whole idea. He thinks as much as possible out of classroom experiences would make it the most beneficial form possible. They've been talking about using pre-major and major advising as being fundamental to this idea. They would promote this a lot as unique to Vassar and beneficial to students.

-Strong thinks fieldwork could be a good option to improve this.

-Activities asked about majors and if you'd need two courses for each major.

-Operations thinks that thinking about the mission statement is great, but thinks that it has to be considered that the mission is fulfilled through out of class experiences just as much as in class. Gender in the sciences is another important point to think about.

-2014 asked about integrating it as a requirement for each major. He thinks that getting this requirement in a different field might be more beneficial and having it isolated to your field could be non-beneficial. He talked about members of the English faculty making space in their requirements so that students would take them.

-TAs thanked him for bringing it up. He noted that from an interdisciplinary perspective, this isn't difficult to do and can be done in many ways.

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-2015 is excited that he's looking at this in a different way than previous years. On the practical side, she sees lots of challenges. She wants to make it happen.

-Main asked how they plan to restructure coursework in departments. No one can tell a department what to do. It has to be the collection of them voting. Some Departments would have to simply add another course or replace a current course, and what if they just say no? The idea would be to go to individual faculty members in each department to advocate and go that way.

### 8 Open Discussion

-2013: 198 days until commencement. They will be supporting senior days. This past Saturday they had women's squash and they had a really good turnout; they provided markers and paper for signs. Rugby and soccer did really well this weekend!

-Cushing and Noyes are hosting DDR dance revolution. Each hour will be a new decade. They are using the MPR and the Villard this Saturday 10-2.

-Operations thanked all at large members for participating today. She's in a play on Friday that everyone should go to, President is too!

-President noted that people should email him about something.

-Joss asked about what's happening with the smoking ban. The conversation is still opening up at this point. The resolution they talked about is simply a conversation starter. Nothing is being pushed through keg ban style. They are still working on gathering opinions, etc. Exec is working on using the channels that already exist.

-2015 asked about changing the structure of the room from this side to the other. We're waiting for a moveable projector.

-Raymond asked about the lemons. There was general laughter and confusion.

-Main made a motion to adjourn. This motion passed with all in favor.

-There's a Ferry concert this weekend.

-The meeting was adjourned at 9:09 p.m.