

# VASSAR STUDENT ASSOCIATION

## VSA Council Minutes for March 27, 2011

1 Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:15 p.m.

2 Attendance .....Operations

-All here, except for Operations for whom Student Life is proxy.

3 Consent Agenda

- a. Approval of Minutes from 3/20
- b. Allocation of \$330 to French Club from Community Fund
- c. Allocation of \$138.90 to VJU from
- d. Allocation of \$450 to Poder Latino from
- e. Allocation of \$325 to VARC from
- f. Allocation of \$500 to Act Out from
- g. Allocation of \$400 to Phil from

-All adopted.

4 Allocation of \$1,500 to Run Vassar from Speakers & Lecturers ..... Finance

-They are bringing Kathrine Switzer who is the first woman to run the Boston Marathon and has since done a lot for the sport, like starting the Boston Marathon for Women, the NY marathon, etc. She has also done a lot for women's rights in general. She would come on April 12<sup>th</sup> at 7 p.m. Her cost is \$2,000.

-This motion passed with all in favor.

5 Allocation of \$6,000 to ViCE from Community Fund ..... Finance

-ViCE came into this year with \$12,000 of debt, which they pushed \$6,000 of to next year. The event is the spring concert which will feature Of Montreal and the Knocks. They decided to host the event in Walker Field House as an alternative space and they think it will be very popular with the students.

-Joss asked about the acoustics in the new space. Apparently the space has been altered so as to improve acoustics.

-Socos asked about Relay for Life. The answer was that some of the proceeds from each ticket will go towards the Cancer Society. They want it to be an all-day event.

-Davison asked about how they have dealt with the debt this year and how it's affected their events. The response was that each committee has taken a 10% hit and they kept this in mind in planning all their events. Ticketweb.com is the website where they'll be selling tickets in advance.

-All in favor of this allocation except 2012 who abstained.

6 Constitutional Amendments .....Operations

-Student Life: Executive Board decided that they should not take a stance on this issue.

They made the mistake of not starting out with a neutral voice, so that's why they sent out

another email and had a question and answer session. They began these changes in order to give VSA a multidirectional perspective. They added an Advisory Council with the goal of giving different voices a place in the VSA. They talked to a lot of students and administrators, and began to realize that the current strategy wasn't working and that they need to make a more fundamental change to the VSA structure. The goal is to get a wide spectrum of voices involved and they consulted with all the peer institutions and decided on these changes. They presented it to council about 3-4 weeks ago and then officially sent it to the student body right after Spring Break with the official language. One of the issues that he personally believes should be addressed is accessibility (who can approach this student). They want to put forward someone that can represent all the students at the same time. They want the whole class to vote in Senators, not just the people in a house. Students have said that usually issues are brought to council through some house member. They know that we are a house-centric community, but they also know that not everyone identifies with their house and they want these voices to be heard too. They decided to stay away from messing with the house team structure. They decided instead on focusing more on improving BHP by starting a Residential Life Council that will discuss all these issues. They think that specific Res. Life issues should be put in a separate body, whereas campus issues left to Council so that both of these topics can be given the time and attention that they need. The composition is where there was a big change. The power of the executive board has felt a little too strong this year—they want a larger representation of leaders in each committee meeting and less 'at large' electable committee members, but rather constant assigned roles for the senators. The end goal is a more accessible and representative leading body. The voting will be article by article.

-Lathrop feels that the new structure delegitimizes the residential support to council. She thinks that the increase in representation isn't actually legitimate; she feels it's more accessible to talk to house presidents rather than senators. She stated that it's all too quick and close to elections. They think this is too complicated, too rushed, and that one email isn't quite enough. Her constituents are happy that people care and that an increase in the freshman vote and the Fund App. problem are being addressed. She thinks individual positions need to be analyzed and individuals made more aware of their duties. She can't support it.

-Main supported staying positive about this whole process. He doesn't think we'll make the most constructive changes through this one meeting. He thinks meetings that aren't constrained by Robert's Rules have been much more productive. The feedback that he has received from his house has been overwhelmingly negative. He thinks that the changes addressing the fact that only a certain type of person runs for VSA aren't actually fixing this problem. He also feels that a lot of VSA's problems are institutional issues that can't necessarily be fixed by these changes. He doesn't believe that accessibility is improved. He also thinks that more time should be taken to make such dramatic changes and that all of

our problems need to be looked at from various angles, like the fact that house presidents could have given up more time/effort.

-2014 had negative and positive feedback. The overwhelming response was that of hesitance to change. He wants to look more at what council can do, instead of what they can't. He feels that many people don't know how VSA works and therefore don't really understand these changes. He has experienced a lack of focus on various issues. He has heard VSA referred to as a listening body rather than a voice. He thinks that this new system gives more diverse bodies of people a voice and allows all students to be part of the VSA.

-2011 feels that this new system takes away from the individualized views of different groups of people, and generalizes important issues. She does think that things need to change and that there are systematic issues, but that this change is too sudden. She knows that Exec board put a lot of effort into this and that some of these changes are very valid, but she has to vote no because her constituents have expressed negative feedback. She got the most negative feedback from people who know the system well, in contrast to what 2014 reported.

-TAs thinks that students will definitely run for these new positions. She feels that students are concerned about global issues and even if they don't feel as connected to their houses, they can connect to important issues. She feels that house teams aren't actually that accessible to freshmen and juniors. She thinks they need to focus on the sophomore slump more. She believes the administration responds to pressure and these changes will allow the students to get things passed that they're passionate about.

-Town Students stated how the student government represents the school and she feels that they should spend more time educating their students about important community and global issues. She feels that the new system is great for people who don't want to run for house president, but are still passionate about educating the campus. She sees a major change as the only way to make a change. She thinks it's a great opportunity to educate people about the responsibilities of the new positions and how VSA works. She thinks that we can do anything, we just have to believe this; people are apathetic about government in general, but this is our chance to make a difference. Vassar used to be an activist school and she wants this to still be the case. She thinks this is a fantastic opportunity to have discussions and make the VSA procedures more transparent. It's a way to create a new culture and mobilize students in a positive way. We have some great administrators who will support us and we should take advantage of this.

-THs agreed with a lot of what Town Students said, but also says it's hard to support this if his constituents aren't in favor. He wants to support including seniors in BHP council so that they have a voice as well.

-Student Life talked about how the Residential Council will have certain mandates, like meeting times and days/week. There will be a board that ideally has the power to get

changes made. Putting all the res life issues in one pocket will give them the power to make a real change.

-Joss felt that he couldn't support the changes because of his constituents' views, but he thinks they should highlight certain aspects of the new constitution and make changes. He thinks VSA was a mess last year and at least they've improved transparency, reputation, and prestige of VSA this year. He feels that although there are big issues, the day to day issues are the ones that affect people more. He personally supports the revision, but feels that if it fails, they still have a voice.

-Alex asked everyone to take a moment to remember their first day at Vassar. One of the most profound moments for him was the first time he met his house team and the VSA president and thinks that the community (dorm centered) aspect of Vassar is a very important one. He thinks changes do happen in the hallways and we need to give them power.

-Finance wanted to stress that the fact that this many people are here doesn't mean that everyone is advocating. He agrees that house presidents are important, but he stressed that people run for President because they want to be President, not sit on Council.

-Hannah felt that as a freshman she went to her house team when she had a problem, but only because she didn't know who else to go to. She thinks class pride is also important and doesn't necessarily exist as much as house pride. She expressed frustration by the fact that everyone is discussing two separate things, and thinks this provides evidence of why they should actually be separated. Some change needs to be made that educates the students on their governance. A lot of cobwebs need to be cleared. No one wants to be here for 4 hrs.

-Lathrop thinks that we do need to spend less time talking about Res. Life issues on Council. She feels that we have the power to change council to issue based things, but we haven't worked on it very much this year. She is very passionate about this, but didn't mean to set a negative tone. She talked about Programming for parties. She thinks that they need to make changes to what we have right now, not this entire change. She feels like we're putting too much pressure on orgs that can often be inconsistent, like class councils. She thinks the same changes can be made through the current system. She's had the representatives in her house tell her that no one goes to her specifically. She feels very passionately about the 'down the hall' method of inciting change.

-Strong felt personally attacked by a few comments. She doesn't agree with the "certain type of person" idea; she felt it doesn't really make sense. She feels that everyone has something to give. She feels she's an activist and really cares. She doesn't know how useful this discussion is because we're just going back and forth on this. It's all too rushed.

-Charlie wanted to recognize the effort being put in. He wants to focus more on the process of the bill, rather than the content. He feels that the focus on the fact that the students are misinformed about this bill is backwards, because they weren't even involved in the process.

This is especially important because what we're talking about is all about encouraging student activism.

-2014 feels he's worked very hard this year in getting to know the council and his constituents. He feels that coming in here with a set decision is wrong—they have to consider what the involved elected students know and what the general student body knows. He feels that everyone is passionate, but he feels that Res. Life issues are coming up in the wrong place and too often. He knows that they have the power to do this, but he wants everyone to take a moment and look at what we've gotten done this year, according to him not much, even though we're passionate. He thinks that senators would improve the class system and make it more influential. He feels the class representative senators are given less influence because the house teams are given so much. He wants to help make changes and feels that having senators who are activists and who have time to be in touch with their activist sides is very important. He thinks the class council is a better engine of getting issues covered.

-President thinks that one of the prominent threads is the rushed nature of this proposal. Referendum was voted into being in April 2009. If we use this then we will have until April 11<sup>th</sup> to continue discussing this. The student body would then simultaneously elect the VSA and decide how they want it to be run. He made a motion to 5 min recess and the motion passed.

-Academics made a motion to send this to referendum. The referendum will allow students to vote for both council and composition together.

-Matt wants to see a council that moves towards student body issues and wants to see a council with such good intentions succeed.

-Shanaye feels that the issue has been framed in a way that these changes would mean lack of dorm pride and down the hall changes. She also feels that although it's true we could make changes, the reality is that we haven't.

-Mitchell addressed the issue of ego-driven running and why there's been lots of opposition from dorm presidents. He feels that these changes in the second semester are not correct because it allows the positions someone is running for to change. He supports it, but has to be against it in this time frame.

-Sharon felt that this would be a positive change so that it at least can be tried out and if it doesn't work, we can always change back. She likes the new set-up of Council.

-Hannah felt that many people view VSA as a place where nothing gets done, but she feels like this discussion is changing this opinion. She thinks having this discussion sooner than later is great and although top down changes can be dangerous; they may be good right now.

-President: the constitutional referendum would have to take place before elections. Once the results are out, then they are immediately put into the constitution. Filing begins April 11<sup>th</sup>, so by the latest they would have to give out the results by April 10<sup>th</sup>. April 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup>

would be voting. The time until then would be used to publicize it; discussions could be had in dorms, etc. The options are having Council vote on it, or getting the people to do this whom would be choosing to do this on their own. 40% of the student body has to participate in order for the referendum to pass. You need 150 signatures to get the referendum and then 40% for it to pass. If participation is under 40% then the referendum is null and the changes are in order.

-Corey suggested that the VSA just vote and if it passes then it will probably go to referendum anyway. He thinks that council is much more knowledgeable about what is going on and therefore they have the right to vote over the limited knowledge of the general student body. He says make the vote.

-Student Life feels that the internal committees are where they do a lot of work, but where many council members don't show up. He also stated how when he was a dorm rep his constituents would come to him to discuss day to day issues, not issues about the sexual assault policy, etc. He feels that the individual structures work, but he doesn't feel that together they are productive—efficiency is very important for busy Vassar students. He has a committee that talks about B&G, dining, and security all in one, so individually they aren't getting enough attention. He stressed the fact that this year has been one of the first that VSA has been a priority for many house presidents. He thinks that the referendum would be a good idea if they don't want to decide on something today.

-Seth is on both sides. He feels the VSA is being redundant. They should be focusing on referendum; he thinks that if you are against this new constitution, then you should not send this to referendum, but if you are for it, then it should go to referendum.

-Strong feels that the 2 weeks given by the referendum isn't enough to give it a legitimate student voice—she thinks we shouldn't pass these changes and revisit it next year, but in the case that it is sent to referendum then it needs to be highly advertised.

-Ferry wants to pass these changes.

-2011 would rather hear from the students.

-2014 feels that Council is the most reliable body to vote. He feels that if it doesn't pass here, then it won't come up again and the same problems will continue. He feels that the amount of time that Council has put into this makes it the right thing to do.

-Joss supports passing the referendum due to the fact that the VSA is made up of the entire student body. He feels that maybe he's better informed, but that doesn't mean he knows better. He feels very strongly that this is the right change. More time is key.

-Jewett feels that there are problems with the current system, but she feels that this will definitely come up next year if we don't pass it now and that this would be beneficial because we could make it better. She thinks handing it over to the students with the info that they have now isn't quite right.

- Lathrop stressed the fact that Council will change. She thinks that they need more time and that if it's supposed to happen people will push for it even harder next year. She wanted to stress that she ran for her position knowing that VSA would be a high priority.
- Charlie wanted to reiterate that the council has to vote based on its people not based on the fact that it has some "superior knowledge".
- Town Students feels that council, as leaders, haven't been able to talk about this face to face with all their constituents. She feels that the language isn't that accessible to the students. She encouraged people who hate VSA to run to be on it as she did. She feels that these changes will give people the opportunity to spend time on things that matter. She's worried that if we do send it to referendum then Council won't do a good enough job of getting the word out and educating people.
- Activities spoke to the fact that because people are so worried that students don't have a voice speaks to the need for a new system.
- Alex expressed concerns about having all the senators potentially concentrated in one house and accessibility issues do to this. He feels that though it may look good on paper, these things don't always pan out.
- Finance felt strongly about the opinions due to ego and how he doesn't want another wasted year.
- Main is uncomfortable with the referendum because we won't know the results until 1 day before filing. He thinks they aren't effective if they rush through things. He also addressed talking about other restructuring issues like Exec. board.
- 2014 feels that if there isn't any change, no change will happen. Council can't spend a whole year on making a change because it refreshes every year. He doesn't support the referendum.
- Strong doesn't feel like they were involved enough in these decisions.
- Finalized language needs to be sent out by Friday, but only the parts that apply to the senatorial positions. There was a lot of clarification discussion.
- The referendum is based on Article 7, 9 and article 6 section 1.
- In favor: Joss, Socos, Davison, THs, Ferry, 2011. Opposed: TAs, 2014, 201, Finance, Activities, Student Life, Academics, 2013, Strong, Noyes, Cushing, Main, Jewett, Operations, Lathrop, Raymond, and Town Students.
- This motion failed.
- Molly doesn't feel like they've had very much process focused events or issues and this is not helpful to involving the students. She asked why students weren't included more in this process. The response was that they had mentioned restructuring multiple times before, but they just didn't want to give out misinformation. Activities said that all of these changes were made due to concerns brought up on campus. She feels that it's unfair that there's 1 freshman on Council, and 6 Juniors.

-Ale also expressed concerns with the process, even though he's in favor of the changes. He's in favor of passing the changes because if we don't do it now, he's afraid they won't do it next year.

-Lathrop worried more about the rush.

-Town Students felt that many of the house presidents have a lot on their plates and she really feels that these changes will allow there to be people on Council who really care and have the time to make it more process based. She thinks that sophomore slump, JYA, declaring, etc. are all very important class based issues that could be addressed by these changes. Hopefully the process will be clear the whole way through with the new system.

-2014 is absolutely for these changes. He thinks we've focused too much on the hang-ups and he thinks that these changes will open up a new dynamic power for VSA, that things will get done better in the right places.

-Noyes is full of mixed feelings. She believes strongly in personal interaction. Focus on the future based change—this isn't for us, it's for Vassar as a whole in the future. She suggested that we need to look at how we live and what we do. She wants to make sure that the correct people will be emphasized if this happens. Council has the power to connect people.

-President talked about traditions at Vassar "tradition isn't something you repeat, but something you reinterpret." He encouraged "using our time here" and giving new meanings to current systems. That's his challenge to us.

-The motion is to amend article VII.

In favor: TAs, 2014, THs, 2013, Ferry, Finance, Activities, Student Life, Operations, Academics, Noyes, 2011, Raymond, Town Students.

Opposed: Joss, Socos, 2012, Davison, Strong, Cushing, Main, Jewett, Lathrop

-14 to 9 this motion fails.

-Article VI, section 7: all in favor, motion passes.

-Article X passes with all in favor except 2013 who abstained.

## 7 Open Discussion..... Anyone

-2011: 56 days until graduation, Mahonneys sometime soon, if any org wants to plan an event during senior week contact her.

-THs: if anyone feels strongly about these changes, it's still an option.

-Lathrop feels it's unacceptable that the meeting started 15 min late and that Operations was absent.

-Joss is really bummed, and hopes there's more they can do about this. He has hope for the future. He congratulated 2011 on 50 nights. THANK YOU to everyone that came!

-Sharon felt insulted by the people that voted against this motion and she will continue to mobilize students for change.

-Academics reiterated that this isn't over and talked about Student Seminars happening starting tomorrow.

- Corey spoke to the amazing things that happened here tonight and the passionate people he's surrounded with, although he is disappointed.
- 2014 will petition.
- Seth thinks that a speaking time should have been enforced and that next year it will happen.
- Strong voted against this because she wants the conversation to continue. Roaring 20s will be happening in UpC April 9<sup>th</sup>. Jazz band from 10-1, Afro Electric 1-2.
- Ale asked about changing the decision that was made. Anyone can gather the 350 signatures. He thinks everyone should take this opportunity to use the momentum. People that agree with this aren't being as vocal.
- Mitchell wanted to support everyone in their decision and thinks that people voted in their right after 5 hours of discussion.
- Matt thinks that changes still need to be made, even though he wasn't in favor of these amendments.
- Jewett voted because of the poll that her constituents gave her. She thinks that the process by which they went about proposing these changes was wrong and not the changes themselves.
- Cushing was hurt by what was said and thinks the student voice was represented by her vote and that if the students really want it then they'll get it
- 2014 talked about petitioning it.
- Seth thinks they should leave it until next year, not have VSA bring up a petition.
- Activities feels it's inappropriate that Council leaders rejected Sharon's opinion because she has been super involved in all decisions.
- Town Students feels that this is a great chance to talk to people and discuss the changes.
- Hannah wanted to stress that everyone's voice should be respected. She wants everyone to stay involved and they can do this by emailing her to start the discussion at [Haturk@vassar.edu](mailto:Haturk@vassar.edu).
- Charlie reiterated why people voted 'no,' because there wasn't transparency, there wasn't involvement in the process, and much of the student body didn't understand what they were voting for.
- Ben, a town student, wanted to thank the people that voted 'no' because he felt that he didn't fully understand what was happening and still doesn't. The student body needs to be informed.
- Ferry understands why people voted the way they did and doesn't think that we should analyze why people voted how they did because it's over.
- Joss said thank you and made a motion to adjourn.
- President thanked everyone who was involved in the process and expressed his view that the VSA council cannot continue as it is.
- The motion passed with all in favor and the meeting was adjourned at 12:24 p.m.

*Note from Note-taker: My sincerest apologies if I missed anything vital to anyone's argument. Maintaining the Speaker's List was more challenging than usual due to the increased involvement (which was amazing!). Let me know if there are concerns and I can make changes.*