

VASSAR STUDENT ASSOCIATION

Council Minutes for March 31, 2013

“Nothing’s lost forever. In this world, there’s a kind of painful progress. Longing for what we’ve left behind, and dreaming ahead. At least I think that’s so.”

-Tony Kushner, *Angels in America*

- 1 Call to Order
 - The meeting was called to order at 7:03 p.m.
- 2 AttendanceOperations
 - All here.
- 3 Consent Agenda
 - a. \$931 from Conference to Poder Latino
 - b. \$125 from Discretionary to Challah
 - c. \$491 from Speakers, Lectures, and Panels to GAAP
 - d. \$200 from Preliminary Organizations to VCTV
 - e. \$260 from Collaboration to ACT OUT!
 - f. \$260 from Collaboration to ACT OUT!
 - g. \$700 from Community to Joss
 - h. \$1175 from Discretionary to HYPE
 - i. \$2800 from Discretionary to HYPE
 - j. \$2200 from Discretionary to MICA
 - k. \$1200 from Discretionary to GAAP
 - l. \$3200 from Discretionary to Cushing
 - m. \$1350 from Discretionary to Woodshed
 - n. Minutes from 3/24 meeting
 - All adopted.
- 4 Forum with Betsy Eismeier, Vice President for Finance and Administration, and Bryan Swarthout, Director of Budget and Planning..... (45 min)
 - The college is still working its way out of the recession. The sense is that they will have some serious challenges ahead unless they get their finances into a sustainable mode. They rely on the endowment for a third of their functioning budget. They have been spending at a higher percentage. The net amount they have been taking in has not increased, but they’ve been paying the same costs, financial aid, etc. They are asking if they’ve done enough to get their revenue in order. They always have to be putting money aside to fix buildings. They’ve been using borrowed funds (long term debt) which have allowed them to keep a pace in building renewal. They are creating a science plan replacing Mudd Chemistry, Olmsted, Sanders Physics, and New England. They will all be renovated. It’s unclear if they will be able to continue at this pace. They’re doing work with the board to ensure that all sectors of the campus community have the same fact base on finances. It’s really hard because we’re not poor. We’re a partially renewed beautiful campus, we have great staff and faculty with good

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pay, and we have a loyal alumni body who contribute. They are doing this from a position of strength. It’s about making the best choices for the long term; Vassar’s ambition is what makes the finances difficult. Now they need to have more of a discussion on priorities.

-2015 asked about need blind admission and faculty numbers being cut. She responded that during the recession they made a lot of little changes. They are trying to maintain these two aspects even though they had to change some of the costs for employees and make minor department changes. Financial aid is about \$60 million foregone funds. These are the big things that could be cut, but there are no concrete plans.

-Jewett asked about the \$2,000 increase in tuition. The budget development is iterative. They cannot increase the costs more than the market can bear. It’s a 3.5% increase. That was the maximum the board would contemplate. The rest was about cutting expenses in terms of this budget. Students who are on financial aid submit updated information and depending on this they might experience more or less payments. The \$2000 won’t really affect them. It’s a complex calculus.

-President asked why they’re moving ahead with the science project in this financial context. They talked about it at the faculty meeting. That building has struggled over time; it was not well designed. They’ve been working on this plan for seven and a half years. They delayed it because of the recession. The building rational and the strategic importance of the sciences are key factors in this decision. They’ve also raised about \$42 million towards the project. The cost of debt is so low right now that this was a good time to take on some for this project.

-Finance asked about which of the big cuts she would recommend. She said she would add capital reform to that list because if they do really well maybe they won’t have to cut as much. She thinks it will be a combination of factors. Before they were need blind they modeled that they would have about 52% of students on aid; the last class was about 58%. If they have a change in financial aid it would be at the margins. They have been discussing the risk in something going wrong in their plans. Through attrition, they will have staff employment go down. Going forward, they expect over time positions will be shifted around. She doesn’t think it will be one major move, but this conversation has to happen in the community and that’s what President Hill is planning.

-President asked about the conversations going on now. They’ve tried to strengthen presentations. She is thinking about having this under discussion during a town hall meeting. She’s concerned that a big meeting on finances might not be well attended so she’s looking for another medium. She’s had suggestions about inviting students into small group

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meetings to talk about the future; they would have about 30 students sign up. The campus life office organizes “Soup and Substance” so they’re thinking about working it into that.

-Ferry asked about the divestment campaign and the conversations she’s had with Mary Brigham. She knows that the committee was working hard to answer the proposal.

-Noyes asked how the final decision on budgeting will be made. The governance of the college requires the Board of Trustees to respond to budget issues.

-Cushing asked about study abroad. She understands that they’ve just had to be more stringent in holding to their standards for going abroad. Follow up through the Dean of Studies Office.

-Josh asked about the endowment and its decrease in the past year. This year has been a great year in investments. The volatility is hard for them. They can’t count on 18%. Our portfolio should count on an 8% return. They can’t defer spending. Spending is very steady, but investment return is a little too volatile in this period.

-If anyone has suggestions about having meetings this spring or in the fall please let her know.

5 Executive Board Reports

a. Activities(7 min)

-The Activities Committee has been looking at flaws in the student organizations system. They will be taking the next few weeks to look at the fall leadership conference and what can work better. The BHP stuff is wrapping up.

-Jewett asked how Founders Day is coming. The Merchandise committee is doing great which is what he’s in charge of. Everything is totally on track.

-2014 asked about the changes they’re considering making to the fall leadership conference. They want to make it shorter and make it relevant to every org. He’s excited to see what other committee members have to say.

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

-Finance committee is gearing up for annual budgeting. Applications are open tomorrow and there will be a week for them to apply and then a week of figuring stuff out. They had a windfall from the finance department. He doesn’t foresee any more financial difficulties. The number of complaints coming into Council have been very low compared to historically. Thank you Joss and Jewett for making a new system with more questions/information.

6 Drug and Alcohol Education Committee Update.....2015 (10 min)

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-They’ve written a letter that they want to send to the administration. They want to ban the sale of alcohol related paraphernalia. She thinks students won’t be in favor of these changes. The fact that they insist that organizations fundraise, but want to curtail their ways of doing this isn’t fair.

-Activities disagrees with this idea. It would take out half of the Founders Day Merchandise. It’s a huge draw for orgs’ budgets. He also doesn’t think it will stop people from drinking.

-THs agrees with Activities and asked if they can see a copy of the letter. She also asked who is on the committee. They have a health service representative, a counseling services rep, a representative from security, an EMS, a student rep, campus activities, Rich Horwitz’s office, athletics, a house fellow, a VSA rep, and more. She will scan the letter and send it out.

-Joss thinks that this is a front to shared governance. He doesn’t think they can enforce a rule that comes from the VSA.

-2016 compared this to taking forks away from people for eating.

-Activities asked her to tell them to include him in this letter. He also asked about the timeline. She noted that there isn’t one; it’s been worked on for a year. They’re meeting again in two weeks. The Office of Health Education has research that this will change the drinking culture on campus.

7 Chronicle Certification... ..Activities (15 min)

-The Chronicle is splitting from MICA and they want to be certified as their own org so that they can be part of annual budgeting. They would love to skip over the preliminary organization rules. He proposed suspending some bylaws to do this. This suspension passed with all in favor.

-The motion to certify the Chronicle as a VSA organization is on the table.

-Joss noted that this will also be a problem in the future. Activities noted that they already give them the money through MICA so this is a special case, but they are addressing this issue as it might present itself through other orgs.

-This motion passed with all in favor.

8 Resolution Concerning a Relationship Abuse Charge2016 (15 min)

-This is something Student Life has been working on. He wrote up the resolution. They had a member come in to give a presentation. She briefly introduced this last week. The purpose of the resolution is to define what relationship abuse is and the process for processing these cases. This makes it more clear what the different types are and the procedure for reporting relationship abuse. The resolution says that Council recognizes the necessity for this clause and that they urge it to be done quickly.

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-Joss asked if they’ve had conversations with Chris Roellke and the Committee on College Life. Julian Williams is working on the CCL side. The representative they talked to wanted to get students more involved.

-Finance asked about the legal side of this. Vassar attorneys have looked at it and it’s been cleared.

-TAs was involved with the original relationship abuse charge and hopes this one will move forward.

-2014 made a motion to table this until Exec. talks about it.

-Student Life thinks tabling is a good idea because Elizabeth (the proposer) hasn’t gotten back to her on this.

-This motion passed with all in favor.

9 Resolution Concerning Coursework in Social Awareness.....Academics (15 min)

-Ferrin came in to talk about it. This resolution exists because a pressure exists in the world.

There have been issues of hate speech in Jewett that have catalyzed this. They want to support inclusivity and awareness on campus. They want to integrate coursework that deals with social awareness in each major department. It would look different for each major. For example, most of the multidisciplinary programs already do this. The idea of this would be to make students better scholars in their field; it would make Vassar students more socially aware beings. Most importantly it would give students a common language to discuss issues and integrate work that’s going on outside classrooms in the curricular environment.

-2015 asked if this would mean an additional course for many majors. She’s concerned about the sciences and math. She also asks how faculty will handle this. Ferrin is unsure if it would mean an extra course for each major. In theory it would be a course you would take anyway.

This would require creative solutions considering team teaching and cross-listing. There is willingness among faculty to work on this. Faculty in the sciences have expressed interest.

-Ferry asked if they’ve looked at STS courses and if they could add these to the science courses. Have they met with the chairs of committees yet. The original timeline for this coursework was to have it done this spring. They haven’t done enough background, but they’re trying to move it forward to get it on the faculty’s awareness before they do the hard background research. They do want to bring in additional information. He asked if it would be more effective to do this before. There are hurdles to cover first.

-Jewett asked about a time crunch. They definitely have a time crunch. There is a faculty meeting in early May. They are moving forward as fast as they can. The Academics people are working on it.

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-Main asked about people with correlates in social awareness. Ideally the requirement would be in each student’s major.

-2015 asked why they moved away from a school wide requirement. They moved away from a QA requirement because it would put too much stress on certain departments/classes. They hope that this will be a more meaningful requirement for students in their field of study, not a throwaway. The idea is that it would be an evenly distributed responsibility. She also thinks programs and departments need to challenge themselves to see if they’re addressing these issues.

-Activities asked if there would be a new class in many departments that already address these issues. No.

-2014 expressed concern that if there’s a requirement in the form of one course, would this ultimately limit a student’s ability to take another course to explore their interests.

-Ferry thinks that there are faculty available to teach these and THs thinks they’ll address these concerns.

-Jewett made a motion to table this to Academics and this passed with all in favor.

10 Resolution Concerning Training for Athletics Leaders.....2013 (15 min)

-The idea is that student athletics leaders can better support their teams and have knowledge of resources on campus. A lot of freshmen miss orientation because they’re practicing so having student athletics leaders with this knowledge would help. They haven’t completely decided on the specifics.

-Activities asked about how this would be instated. The department of Athletics is implementing stricter structures and coming up with leadership day and they’re communicating with the Student Athletics Committee. They’re in the preliminary conversations stage still.

-THs made a motion to adopt this. This passed with all in favor.

11 Amendments Concerning Joint Committee Composition.....Operations (5 min)

-This hasn’t changed. She made a motion to adopt this. This passed with all in favor.

12 Amendments Concerning Finance and Annual Budgeting..... Finance (15 min)

-Any rollover will be approved by the Annual Budgeting committee. Orgs can apply for rollover for a one year or five year period. The one year is for an event and the five year is for larger orgs who need to buy equipment.

-2015 asked if orgs that get rollover have limitations to the funds they can apply for. No.

-Finance made a motion to adopt this. This passed with all in favor.

13 Open Discussion

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-2013: There are 55 days until commencement. Happy Easter and Happy Deb’s Birthday. Activities noted that the programming board for next year is changing. They are going to have one chair and four sub chairs. It will be an application process and Activities will be selecting this position on the last day of elections. The Circus Villard room party was an awesome event catering to different people!

-Cushing said Happy Birthday Deb and everyone sang.

-TAs talked about the START survey and it had a lot of drafts, but it’s ready! They are proud of the result and it will be sent out tonight. He encourages everyone to take the survey and encourage their constituencies to take it. The better response, the better informed. Thank you for your work!

-Academics said that Student seminars start tomorrow. There is a Majors Fair at 3 on Wednesday.

-2016 talked about the dorm challenge for the student gift. The dorm with the most gifts will get a pizza party. He doesn’t know how this works with Ferry House. He’s also gotten a lot of great feedback about the carnival.

-2015 noted that she might not be able to keep the DEC letter from being sent.

-Activities asked about the dorm challenge and if senior housing is involved. Maybe.

-THs made a motion to adjourn to watch Game of Thrones! This passed with all in favor.

The meeting was adjourned around 8:40 p.m.