

VSA Council Minutes

April 5, 2009

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:01 PM.

2. Attendance

Proxies: SoCos, TAs.

Absences: VP for Finance.

Guests: Andrew Bennett (Student Asst. to the President), Matthew Brock (Misc), Brian Farkas (Misc), Julianne Herts (Misc), Emma Mitchell (Misc), Molly Turpin (Misc), Andres Posada, Matthew Hauptman, Ruby Cramer, Ashley Farrell (CSA), Annie Hill, Peter Satin, Jeremy Bloom, Aaron Grober (Main VP), Woodrow Travers (Filmmakers), Bonnie D. Velez (Poder Latino), Erika Noll (CHOICE), Melanie Lin (TONCA), Quynh Phan (FPT).

3. Academics Forum

Jon Chenette, Dean of the Faculty, Rachel Kitzinger, Dean of Planning and Academic Affairs, Miriam Cohen, Professor of History and Steve Rock, Professor of Political Science introduced themselves and encouraged Council members to share voice their opinions and questions relevant to academic life at Vassar.

2009 asserted that “advising at Vassar can be very uneven”; he was concerned that some students report “amazing” advising experiences, while others report rather “bumpy” ones. Steve Rock acknowledged that such inconsistency is problematic. Claiming that Vassar places a lot of responsibility on its students to make significant academic decisions, Professor Rock underlined the importance of having “faculty members engaged in deep conversation” with those in their classes and advising groups. He emphasized that students should feel comfortable engaging in discussions of practical academic issues, as well as of their ultimate career and/or personal goals, with their advisors and other professors. Rock also noted that the current financial system provides Vassar with a unique “opportunity to reevaluate our systems [and] get a better sense of what we want advising to do”. Acknowledging that there have been *some* previous attempts made at advisor evaluation (Majors Committee reports, etc.), Miriam Cohen underscored the College’s need to devise a clearer, more thorough process for assessing major and thesis advisors. Dean Chenette stressed that professors “need to think of advising as a form of teaching”, and that he hopes to encourage more equal distribution of advisees across professors and departments.

2011 suggested devising CEQs that pose pointed questions about the strengths and limitations of each course, ask for ideas about how the professor might improve instruction, and inquire as to whether or not the student would opt to take additional courses with this professor. He also strongly suggested that students be returned their graded final exams, and recommended that an online database with professors’ office hours be made available to all members of the community. Dean Chenette responded that he is in the process of “rolling a new content management service for college databases”, and that he hopes to establish an online database with updated faculty bios, office hours and course announcements in the near future.

Ms. Kitzinger asserted that that the College truly cannot rely on “just one instrument to evaluate teaching”, and should perhaps combine input from current students with evaluations by alumni and/or other faculty members. She did stress, however, that blank page CEQs have been

“the most helpful”, telling form of evaluation. Miriam Cohen echoed this sentiment, explaining that CEQs provide the College with a unique means of assessing *both* broad trends and “quirky” individual comments.

Ms. Kitzinger also recommended that students interested in reviewing past exams contact their professors; College policies state that, if they wish to do so, students may meet with professors to read and discuss their final exam assignments. Rock cautioned, however, that – because of the Registrar’s deadline for final grades submissions - many professors “don’t write as many comments on final exams” as they do on senior theses and projects.

TS was concerned about the efficacy of administering CEQs at the end of each course’s final meeting, and suggested making professor evaluation forms available online. She admitted that she often feels a lack of closure when her courses culminate with CEQs. Additionally, she expressed worry that, since they are permitted to leave class after completing CEQs, many students do not devote adequate time and effort to evaluations because. During the final week of classes – a time when schedules are particularly hectic - students may feel that spending longer filling out CEQ forms keeps them from attending to studying or other activities. TS concluded by encouraging the College to devote special attention *teaching ability* when evaluating professors, as she was concerned that factors like tenure status or published works may be too highly valued in faculty assessment and selection. Miriam Cohen responded that the College will “think hard about teaching *and* scholarship” when hiring new professors and making decisions about current faculty cuts. Steve Rock acknowledged the difficulty of finding an appropriate time or means for conducting CEQ data, but emphasized that administering evaluations on the final day of classes is often the best strategy for ensuring high participation rate and an accurate distribution of student participants.

Operations endorsed the idea of faculty members observing and evaluating one another, and encouraged the College to pursue this strategy next year. She then urged the administration to “look at what’s expected of department chairs” and stressed that chairs should “more proactive about telling students what’s going on”, particularly with regard to curriculum changes and faculty cuts.

2009 called for the institution of “a more structured service or venue” through which students and faculty alike can express and review feedback on courses. He elaborated that students are eager to learn about specific courses and professors, but that they are often forced to turn to sites like “ratemyprofessors.com” because the College does not provide them with access to CEQ data. As 2009 affirmed, such websites are often of dubious reliability, and the administration would do well to establish a “more fair” and legitimate system of its own. Miriam Cohen agreed with 2009’s basic sentiments, but admitted that issues of privacy and confidentiality prevent the College from publishing CEQ results in this fashion.

Julianne Herts, of the Misc, stated that “it would be nice if Pre-Major advisors knew more about other departments”, and that she has been concerned about Vassar’s ability to preserve small class sizes in the face of faculty cuts. Dean Chenette and Professor Rock responded that the College might be able to better “spread out [professors by] taking releases away” from department chairs, as well as by allowing for “less team teaching”.

Joss recommended that the College devote additional attention to evaluation of tenured teachers, as he sensed that there currently exists “no viable way of keeping them accountable”. Professor Rock announced that he hopes to improve communication among the faculty and administration in the coming years, and that he expects to see subsequent improvements in professor’s student- and self-assessments.

4. Announcements

a. Fines

As the VP for Finance was unable to attend the meeting, the VP for Activities explained that she would be making all fine announcements and allocation proposals in his place. She noted that 2010, Cushing, Jewett, Main, Strong, ASA, Homework Club, CHOICE and Run Vassar had each been fined \$10 for late org report submission. Joss CSA, Catalyst, EMS, Improv Club, Investment Club, QCVC, Sailing Team, Vassar Association of Class Activists, VOX, Vassar Bikes, Vassar Greens, VJU and WOCA were each fined \$25 for failure to submit an org report. QCVC and VOX were each fined \$25 for failure to attend the mandatory all-treasurer's meeting.

5. Reports

a. Founder's Day Committee Report

The VP for Activities read Council a report submitted by the Founder's Day Committee chairs. The committee has written to the Board of House Presidents, to President Hill, and to various deans asking for donations. Cappy has made a \$3000 donation, and the committee is waiting for a response from two of the deans.

The music sub-committee has generated a list of bands that will perform; "Buffalo Drive", "Bare Hands", "Francis and the Lights" and "Holy Ghost" are just a few of the groups that will be featured. Contracts have been sent out and should be finalized by next week. The final slot is still open and there are three potential bands available, but the committee is waiting to finalize the slot until it has a clearer sense of how many funds remain in the budget.

Decorations plans have been completed and some supplies have been purchased. The games list is also ready, and will likely include a waterslide, Guitar Hero and Dance Dance Revolution. Eight committee members have devised a set of activities for the Kids Tent, and they have begun pricing items. All merchandise has been ordered, and items should be received around April 22nd.

Letters will be sent out to the following vendors next week: Rossi's, Amici's, Marco's, Frosty Rock, Jerk Stop, Julie's, Lola's Catering, Mahoney's, Mole Mole, Reggae Boy Café, Rolling Bakery, Soul Dog, Thai Spice, Twisted Soul and Zorona's. The committee will soon narrow this list down to a final set of four vendors.

Beer sampling will take place on April 19th, and selection and ordering will occur immediately thereafter.

b. RLAC Committee Report

Main announced that RLAC has met approximately 7-10 times this semester, and has recently completed a new Intersession Housing Policy that seeks to "relieve the pressure" placed on Noyes over breaks.

Current and future projects include developing leadership, community and accountability in Residence Halls, as well as reviewing and streamlining the Residential Life Guide to ensure that it is clear and accessible to students. The committee is also hoping to institute a system that will provide individual TAs, THs, and SoCos with information about their consumption of water and other resources.

c. Student Life

The VP for Student Life noted that he has “had many conversations in the past few days” regarding Baldwin and the likely elimination of 24-hour health services on campus. Many EMTs have expressed worry about the potentially detrimental effects such changes may have on Vassar’s relationship with the Arlington Fire Department and local hospitals. Other students have voiced similar concerns about the ways in which eliminating late-night campus health services might negatively impact community relations. Student Life stated that, according to many students and Arlington residents, Vassar has a certain degree of “responsibility” when it comes to dealing with issues relevant to members of its immediate community.

Student Life has also begun work on the generation of a Purchasing Policy, and he hopes to “have something in place by the next CCL meeting”. He explained that a task force has been formed and will meet by the end of the week.

The VP for SL has also been looking at how the economy will affect sustainability and local foods. He is working with the College to negotiate with area vendors to ensure that Campus Dining can supply local foods “for many years”.

In Elections news, the Board of Elections intends to be in constant communication with future Davison residents, and plans to determine a centrally located, neutral campaigning space for candidates.

The VSA is now evaluating potential uses for the C-store space, and is “looking at...[making] it a permanent space for off-campus vendors”. The Rights and Responsibilities subcommittee of CCL is in the process of distilling major college regulations “into one document”, and plans to complete a formal document of student rights and responsibilities by the end of the year.

6. Allocation of \$3200 from Speakers/Lectures/Panels to FPT

The VP for Activities moved to allocate \$3200 from Speakers/Lectures/Panels to Forum for Political Thought for its “War Without Human” lecture by Professor Raymond Duvall. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

7. Transfer of \$3000 from Hosting to Speakers/Lectures/Panels

The VP for Activities moved to transfer \$3000 from the Hosting Fund to the Speakers/Lectures/Panels Fund. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

8. Allocation of \$1500 from Speakers/Lectures/Panels to CSA

The VP for Activities moved to allocate \$1500 from Speakers/Lectures/Panels to CSA for its “Carifest Week Lecture” on April 9th. THs abstained, though all others were in favor, and the motion passed.

9. Allocation of \$600 from Council Discretionary to Filmmakers

The VP for Activities moved to allocate \$600 from Council Discretionary to Filmmakers for “Death Ranch”, ”a short Western film that is being shot as a spec for a larger feature film of the same length”. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

10. Allocation of \$250 from Speakers/Lectures/Panels to CHOICE

The VP for Activities moved to allocate \$250 from Speakers/Lectures/Panels to CHOICE for “Bondage 102”, an event that will provide students with an opportunity to learn about the often taboo subject of BDSM in a safe, supportive environment”. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

11. Transfer of \$750 from Conference to Speakers/Lectures/Panels

The VP for Activities moved to transfer \$750 from the Conference Fund to the Speakers/Lectures/Panels Fund. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

12. Allocation of \$2000 from Speakers/Lectures/Panels to CHOICE

The VP for Activities moved to allocate \$2000 from Speakers/Lectures/Panels to CHOICE for “Gender-Free Orgasm”. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

15. Allocation of \$1000 from Council Discretionary to Hip Hop Theatre

The VP for Activities moved to allocate \$1000 from Council Discretionary to Hip Hop Theatre for “Life and Death in Power Kingdom”. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

16. Allocation of \$750 from Conference Fund to Poder Latino

The VP for Activities moved to allocate \$750 from the Conference Fund to Poder Latino for the National Dominican Students Conference. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

17. Allocation of \$500 from Council Discretionary to TONCA

The VP for Activities moved to allocate \$500 from Council Discretionary to TONCA for “I Won’t Grow Up Day”. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

18. Amendments to Article III and IV of the VSA Bylaws

The VP for Operations moved to approve amendments to Article III and Article IV of the VSA Bylaws, as presented at the March 29th VSA Council meeting. All were in favor, and the motion passed. Jewett s at the end of “semester” in section C.

19. Open Discussion

- 2009 announced that 49 days remained until graduation.
- President reminded Council that elections begin on April 15th.

20. Adjourn

The meeting concluded at 9:09 PM.