

VASSAR STUDENT ASSOCIATION

Council Agenda for December 1, 2013

Time: 7:00pm

Location: College Center 223

“You cannot protect yourself from sadness without protecting yourself from happiness.”

-Jonathan Safran Foer

- 1 Call to Order
- 2 Attendance.....Operations
- 3 Consent Agenda

a. Minutes, November 24, 2013

- 4 Forum with Chris Roellke, Dean of the College (20 min)

Pres – last week we had a conversation about communication mostly between administration and us.

Chris - Thank you for having me in. There've been rumors roaming around and I'd like to dispel them. Some of the things I've been hearing is why couldn't we name the students etc., etc. I want to assure you this was done with the students' integrity in mind. In this case the students chose to withdraw after taking responsibility. There were many witnesses present. I believe this was as best an outcome for the students that could be possible. I may not be able to answer all of my questions but I'll do my best

Pres. – I was hoping you could speak to what info. Is allowed to be communicated to students and why”?

Chris – it's our policy to not reveal names. Regretfully some have come out in the press. The college never reveals names of students.

Finance- is it standard to email the entire student body?

Chris - I think in this particular case it was. It was important for the student community to know

Main – was there any specific reason as to why the administration revealed this after the town hall meeting?

Chris- the negotiations with these students concluded at 6:30 pm Monday and town hall was at 7. I think that meeting would have gone differently. I want to champion all of my colleagues for standing up at rough times – with tremendous diplomacy and care I was very proud of them and my college.

Student life- I've heard from students that it seems like the administration thinks it has solved the problem.

Chris - we still have a lot of work to do. That does not account for all biased incidences. We have to continue to do this work. I'm sorry if that's emerging as a perception. I think the BIRT have been doing good work. Absolutely, we have to keep our feet to the fire

2015 – In terms of press, are you confirming what those are saying? Might you have any insights on how they got that information? I was wondering if you could talk to the decision making of the creation of the email.

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Chris – as always, the college chooses not to comment. I have no idea how names were gotten. It certainly wasn't the college. The BIRT also put together a fairly clear view of their process. We were going to empower that team to send that message. In this particular case, we allowed BIRT to send it out. I was delighted to see that that group was working so hard. They themselves sent out that message

Finance – I think this is a room full of student leaders and another frustration is that the folks cleaning this are the people in this room. How do we move forward? How are we supporting those people?

Chris- we have a couple things planned. I'm having a lunch series with the campus life resource center and a few students. My coming here is another example. I hear you. A lot of folks feel betrayed I think it's going to take some time to heal. Silvia B. is putting together a series of opportunities to debrief on the experience and to vent. Some of this is also a timing issue. It happened right before thanksgiving break I think the resources are on campus as they always are. I would encourage people to take advantage of those. That may not be a satisfactory answer, but that it was I have at the moment. We've spoken of having a larger community meeting. Some ideas are emerging and I'd love to hear more from students

Academics - How do you think an incidence affects our education process [with social consciousness]? Do you think these are separate concerns?

Chris – as you've heard at the town hall meeting, this kind of incident will stimulate discussion about social consciousness.

TAs – can you speak to the timeline [of this case]?

Chris- we've gathered the information that was suggesting that these students were involved. I called those students in one at a time. Julian Williams charged them with violations. Each one was given the opportunity to take responsibility and at that point they were given the choice to withdraw and offered to face panel. They withdrew. I think it was at about 1:30 or 2:30 and we didn't finish until 6:30. One of the students filed a police report on the crime. So the town of Poughkeepsie police allowed us to make this offer and they said they would not pursue them if they withdrew from the school. We believe our students should be treated fairly and with respect. The police were called off. That doesn't mean they can't pursue them in the future, but they chose to back off.

Joss. – I'm curious as to how the investigation process goes. How do you go about solving the biased incidences?

Chris- it's difficult. We had significant hand writing analyses and logs. In the end, the students took responsibility for it. We interviewed folks and photos are taken. We're not police officers, but we do our best. In this case we got it right.

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Strong- last week, I know a lot of the discussion focused around whether there were enough opportunities to talk about it.

Chris- we've had many conversations about communication. Our conclusion was to have the community deal with it in more organic ways as opposed to another email. Another message would have been inherently incomplete.

2014 - is there any information being passed on to the faculty?

Chris - Steve R. has scheduled some meeting time with the faculty on December 11th to talk about this. I don't know how much time will be devoted to it, but yeah, it reaches out to the faculty as well.

Finance - who makes the decision to involve the police?

Chris- in this particular case, the students did. More broadly if we feel as though some thing egregious happens, we need them [the police]. For example, when the West Baptist church came [we needed them]. When we're in over our heads, as a saying, we are not afraid to ask for help from professionals.

Finance- in reporting them to the college... was this a separate reporting?

Chris- they were already deeply engaged with the police.

Pres. - are all students offered the same option?

Chris - not always. I believe this was an emergency situation, I chose to use the powers invested in me. I gave the students the choice to go to a panel. I believe it was the right thing.

Pres. - could you speak to how you made this choice?

Chris -for me it's because the police were banging on our doors. I didn't make this decision all by myself. I was the chief negotiator, but I did not make this decision in isolation. I relied heavily on my colleagues.

Ops. - I'm not going to pretend that I'm a lawyer, but in terms of my understanding, the crime that they would have been punished for is vandalism and filing a false police report. If the vandalism were a misdemeanor, so would the filing of a false report for vandalism be a misdemeanor also? I don't know the whole story, but I guess, it seemed like the action in this case was very strong from every direction. When you tell me the police are knocking on our doors, are they going to know every time a misdemeanor happens on campus?

Chris - the police were regularly on campus taking pictures. We shared evidence, they said if you don't do something now, we're coming to talk to them and possibly arrest them.

TH - a lot of other emails were sent out. I was wondering if you've thought of other ways of communicating with students. A concern I've gotten is that there are a lot to take in at once.

Chris - communications are always tricky. BIRT is working on other than having an email, to have a separate website to read through if you so choose to. These are really hard emails to

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write. Students always want more information. We still want to balance it out with confidentiality and privacy rights.

Student life – could you speak a little bit about any consciousness in terms of protecting anonymity especially because there have been other instances where students were able to leave from campus. I think that for example, the communication between VSA exec board and the administration in terms of how they sent out became an issue. Are there any efforts?

Chris- I think our policy is good. I honestly don't know what we could do to prevent a blogger from blogging. We don't talk about students' experiences in the press. I know it's disappointing and sad, but I don't know what else we could do.

TAs – that same week I got another email from “Catherine Hill,” is this considered cyber terrorism?

Chris- no, it's unfortunate. It was more of a parody. I've had fake twitters made for me. Anyone can create a fake email address. It was unfortunate, but it seemed to have been a short-lived scenario.

2015- how many biased incidences did they commit and what were they charged for? How many biased incidences have occurred?

Chris- I can't speak to that [specifically to these students]. The number of total incidences, since last year, has been 17 biased incidences.

Finance – downstairs, it's posted what the college regulations panels determine. Recognizing that you acted as the college regulations panel, why can't you answer Casey's question?

Chris- because we have not completed the investigation. I can't answer Casey's question with specificity at this time

Ops. - in order to have withdrawn, they had to have admitted to a crime can you tell us what it is?

Chris – I can't, I'm not going to give you the language.

Finance – when it's posted it's clearly outlined what the crimes were?

Pres. - I think the sense we've been getting from other students is that they still want answers.

Chris – if the students withdrew, why is it that we need to know that?

Finance – because we're here dealing with it.

Chris- isn't it enough info to know they left? What are you looking for Michael?

Finance- I guess I'm looking to pinpoint the problem.

Chris- they took responsibility for the most resent BIRT biased incidences and they falsely reported them.

Ops- motion to extend the time.

Chris – do I get any say in this? I don't have much time.

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Pres. - thank you for coming in and thank you for taking the time.

5 Forum with Robert Walton, Chief Finance Officer (45 min)

Robert Walton – grew up in west Texas. I have one supporter in the room so far. Went to the University of Texas in Austin. Worked in the software business for 25 years. I was a CEO of a software company in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Many of you use my software; it’s what runs the library. My first trip to Vassar was in 1989 when I came to sell the system then I continued on in that career until I sold my share. There comes a point when money doesn’t add much to your value of living. I convinced a college in Ohio to hire me and I worked there as a CFO. I worked at the Claremont colleges. I’m getting near retirement age. One thing I missed about working in higher education in Claremont was that I working with all seven schools. Vassar contacted me when they were looking for a CFO; I came back here for Oct 1. I came to Vassar because I have a lot of admiration for Cathy. I believe in the key programs of Vassar. I want to be able to interact with students and faculty. I prefer that people call me Bob please.

TAs – as CFO, what does your day-to-day look like?

Bob- the responsibility include all the accounting and budgeting. I spend time on the endowment, the buildings and grounds and facilities, all the purchasing, the benefit programs [etc.]. Pretty much all the business side, all the major contracts. Most of my time now that I’m transitioned from the Claremont colleges, I spend probably half of my week managing people who manage areas of responsibility. Usually, by the time it gets to me it’s messed up, which is not often here at Vassar. We have a good team. I made sure I wasn’t coming to a turn around. The other half is spent working with the board. Vassar is a big not for profit corporation in the state of NY. That board has a lot of responsibilities, a lot of which are under my management. You’ve got budget finance committee facilities on campus, AUDIT, [etc.]... Typically I staff most of the exec. committee.

2015 - having sat on the student life committee earlier this semester, I was told you were the point person for the student labor dialogues. I’ve been getting mixed messages.

Bob – I just won 10 bucks, 7 minutes in and I got the question. I don’t know their organizational structure; they met with president Hill. All employees unionized and all the benefit programs fall under me. That includes compensation. I met with the three students and I really wanted to hear them out as to what their concerns and desires were. Their desire was to have the student body directly interface with the staff in a forum, which hasn’t been had in a while because of what I’ll call a lack of civility. I told the students that I respected what they were doing but I didn’t agree with them but that that didn’t mean we shouldn’t keep having a dialogue. I recommended we invite those students to observe a forum. It’s not a mean

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spirited meeting. One of the concerns with the VSA meeting is that why do these three students get to go when they're essentially self-appointed, so I suggested one or two VSA people to join. The meeting has been scheduled in December. It'll be a meeting of all of our union employees. That's a little disturbing to me that you'll have to put the employees in categories. Here we kind of put people in buckets and that's not what I prefer but that's the way it is. The one suggestion I agreed with was that it shouldn't be show and tell - it should be a dialogue. We have a lot of important events that need to be given the straight story. I did this in California and I think it went very successfully. There will be dialogue.

Jewett - at this meeting that's going to happen, are there going to be notes taken and is that going to be public to students?

Bob- we haven't thought about that, probably not minutes, but we can certainly have a summary. That's a good idea.

Student life - a concern is that the last meeting that happened involved Cathy walking out because it was over time. You say that it hasn't happened because it did not go civilly. As a member of the exec. board, we don't have that say in what issues we can or cant fix. Why does the administration have that say?

Bob - I wasn't there, I don't know what happened. I've talked to people about it. I think the reason Cathy left was because she was being yelled at. I've been to these meetings where people get upset. I think she wants to have these resume. We even talked about this in my interview. I believe they need to happen more often. I've had these meetings the day after board meetings. The next morning, I would make the same presentation with the staff and the employees and it destroyed the rumor mill. I've never been in a public meeting with Cathy where she's been faced with people that are angry, so I don't know how she deals with that, surely sensibly. But, I'm not going to walk out. Cathy is our leader, but she delegates and expects a lot of the senior officers to also take responsibility. We need to turn the tension down a bit. I've had a meeting with one union- CWA, the other union has cancelled sometimes. I suggested we have a breakfast every month. You don't want to start your relationship once you have an issue. I'm pretty optimistic.

Ops - speaking currently just as a student, I'm interested and would like to see the ways some of the discussions occur as to how students as a group can be supportive to the employees of the campus...We should really be thinking about that a lot more. One way we could do that is by not making their jobs harder.

Socos - how do you prioritize the way money is spent? For students it could be hard to understand. A few weeks ago we had a meeting with Wendy speaking about it.

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Bob – if you’d like to get into detail, I would suggest that at some point we have another meeting where I can prepare and come in and say this is the way it’s done. If you want to think about a college budget, pretty much liberal higher education, there are three things you spend money on. First thing, financial aid, then people (faculty and staff), and then the campus itself. Even though there are a lot of other things, those three things are about 90 percent of the budget. One of the reasons I picked Vassar was that Vassar figured it out. The most important thing, until Cathy and the board tell me something else, is financial aid, then we get the sack we dump it out on the table and see what’s left. The second thing is faculty pay. We’re not all equal here, without them (the faculty) we cant do anything. Then we have the rest of the staff and the benefits and that we’re treating people decently. Then we need to fund the facilities, and right now it’s the biggest burden. Let me give you advice, never do a board meeting the first week of your job. One of the things I pointed out was the [amount of money spent]. I’m not tempted to shift that priority because financial aid is the reason why I came here. What I will spend most of my time doing is figuring out how we’re going to fund the facilities and the discretionary fund.

Academics- what exactly is the efforts that Vassar makes to make college more affordable once we get here? I ask because I know 2/6 are involved in trying to reduce funds for once we are in college.

Bob- you can never do all you can do, so I will never say we’ve done all we can do. If I were to relate the colleges I’ve worked at, we’re definitely the top tier. The Ohio college I worked at is no the sexiest place to go to, but in comparison to that school, the other schools in California have that working for them. Not all college talk about textbooks. I myself had no help from family when I went to college, so I understand. The way financial aid works here is aggressive, it’s among the most aggressive in the country. There are only 12 students I’m aware of, Harvard, Middlebury, Williams, Pamona, etc. that deal with it like that.

THs - I was wondering if you could speak to the college blind?

Bob- need blind admission sis very important. Some are need aware because they didn’t have the resources. The challenge of Vassar is that we do not have a large endowment compared to others. When I had the convo with those 3 students we had something about priority they said people are afraid that they job may go away. And ii said that’s good because it might. We have a three-year plan that was discussed on campus by my predecessor talking about how we are going to have to eliminate jobs and restructure. I understand why people are concerned but that’s the time we live in. We’re going to economize in other areas for the need blind.

2017 – how does the budget work from year to year? Is it sort of already established at the beginning of each academic year?

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Bob – what we do is, we work about a year in advance. Right now, for example, tomorrow morning, if I get to NYC, I have a meeting with the investment committee board and we’re already trying to model what things will look like in 2014/2015. We can predict to a certain degree of accuracy how much we’ll get from students but we don’t know about one year. Another variable is donations. One of the strongest features is how alumni give. 10 million dollars a year is how much they give. Can I guarantee we’re going to get 10 million? I can’t. It’s not as though we’re incompetent or don’t care. It could be that we admit a class that’s particularly needy because of the economy. It may be that a junior or senior student needs more based upon what happens to their family. Budgeting is as much of an art as it is a science. It’s made me a very religious man.

2015 – do you know what the top of your head what the trend is for that fourth mystery year?

Bob- it’s not all over the place, but if you have even a one or two percent, that’s a million dollars. That’s one of the reasons how Vassar did one thing that was brave, speaking as an outsider, when the markets crashed a lot of colleges said we’re not doing need blind anymore, and Vassar did not do that. There was a cost, and we took it from other areas, work, union, and expenditures. There was a decision made. Sometimes the reason that some things have not been funded in the plant side is that is was sort of 3rd or 4th place. I think we have some strategies we can use, but ultimately we need the endowment

Jewett – you keep saying the food chain with the college’s budget. What are you and your office or admin working on where we can void these things? A way where everyone benefits?

Bob – that’s a fair question. We could cap financial aid, and lower the orgs. You can be need-blind in admissions and not fund entirely. The reality is that our biggest commitment so far is to our students, and then we figure everything else out. We have been underfunding for the last 4/5 years in the facilities. That doesn’t mean they’re not underfunded. We’ve had gifts and also we’ve bothered a lot of money. The answer is yes- we could do that. But today, I’m going to place financial aid over jobs. If we had the same amount of endowment as Williams or Pomona did. Let’s say for discussion our endowment is 1 billion dollars, Pomona has 1.8 billion dollars for fewer students, but they even have difficulty as well. It’s always going to be a bit of a struggle. We do pay our staff well with good benefits. I think under the new Obama care, we may have to pay a tax. If you’re over benefiting employees, you actually have to pay taxes.

Noyes – strategically, the structure is beneficial in the short term, but in the long term, if facilities and employment are less of a priority, how that can result in decrease in annual alumni funding.

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Bob – that is a good question. A lot of what’s been happening since the market dropped is tactical planning. We’ve been tactical. We need to get back into the strategic financial planning. If you look in 10/15 years, it actually looks a bit better. We have campaigns every en years. A lot of that campaign is going to pay for building. For example, when are we going to renovate main? It’s not just how to you pay for that, but what are you going to do with everyone in main. We have to have a plan that’s moving us forward. I’d be happy to share that with you once we get there. I’ve only been here for a couple of months. I’m an optimist. I think it can all be fixed so hang in there.

Ops – I fell like this convo is very productive. How in your position do you envision including student opinion in discussing priorities?

Bob- I’m here, ill come as many times as you like. There’s the planning and prioritizing committee. I haven’t found that to be the most exciting meeting I’ve been to. It’s just awkward you have these people come in to represent a huge constituency. We’ll certainly use student government. Sometimes we’ll be able to respect it and sometimes not. As we get into specific projects it is good to have the ability to have dialogues with student informally. It’s really hard to know how to get the word out to students. My experience is that it depends on the topic. You have to be careful not to overweight those five or ten voices. This is probably the safest place to get those views. My door is open all the time so if you have any questions come see me.

6 Pres.- I like that you said that when you just came in, and you said the first thing is to observe the things we do well. We are also looking at things we want to change. The fact we do have need blind admissions is incredible.

7 Bob – I always start with appreciative inquiry. Thanks for having me; I’d love to come back at any time.

8 Executive Board Reports

a. President.....(7 min)

Pres.- I have been to a lot of meetings. Most of them were for student life, while we was not hear. BIRT was a lot of fun; never want to go to one of those again. It was a really, really not fun couple of weeks. People had a lot of feelings and emotions and I’m glad you all shared those. Moving forward, I’m going to be working mainly with student life to advocate for a lot of the things that were on the table. I’ve been meeting with Chris and I met with Judy and Luz last week and we’re going to be pushing the administration to do some projects – really pushing the gender-neutral bathrooms. We’re going to send a timeline on that. The other thing is that campus security and

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campus patrol are more racial sensitivity. In exec today, we spoke about things that us and student life could do for the climate – celebrate the diversity on campus and additionally how we can promote discussion. We’re working on a kind of orientation. The other thing I’m going to be working on is for next semester, I want to plan an event at the end of the year that would be a celebration of everything we’ve accomplished, our orgs, and student groups. Like an activities fair, instead of trying to gain membership, it’ll be to celebrate all we’ve accomplished. Were all really passionate about the things we do.

Main – good job Deb, you’re doing great.

b. Operations.....(7 min)

Ops -I want to tell Danny, welcome to student council. The election went fairly successfully, not in terms of who we elected, but the election as a process, procedurally, went very well. Some concerns were brought up, and those will be addressed most of them by board of elections and myself then ops. Ops has also been working a lot on the appointment process. We are looking to make a new committee – comm. On elections and appointments. It’s something that’s not set in stone and will be discussed a lot more, but you should be looking forward to some new amendments.

Main – the new committee, does that require an amendment to the bylaws how does that work exactly?

Ops – yes it’s something that’s going to have to be changed. Also, it’s just the exact composition is still not set in stone.

Main –and second of all, good job, you’re great.

2014- speaking as board of elections, that the recent board of elections could not have happened without you., thank you so much

Noyes – in terms of the agenda, why does it say appointment?

Ops – I deleted that so it should say nothing.

9 Event Requirement Alteration AmendmentActivities (10 min)

Activities – two weeks ago, activities presented a similar amendment. Saying that activities wanted orgs to have the ability, to be able to hold an event or thing that allowed people from the greater Vassar committee to be involved and the previous bylaw had said general bodies meetings counted as an event and activities didn’t agree with that, so we adjusted that

Ops – there’s one comma missing here, it will be changed.

Socos- in activities, the reason is that there’s some flexibility involved because there are orgs that may have troubles. There’s some flexibility that should be exercised

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Joss - so does that mean that if you're a pre org, it follows this?

Act. - it follows the same thing, they have their own policies, but it's the same.

Amendment passes.

10 Appointment of Noyes Junior Representative.....Operations (10 min)

11 Open Discussion

2014- I want to say that this exercise is the most math I've done in four years so thank you all. The average thanksgiving dinner is 4500 calories. So, one hour of running 6mph could burn 700 calories, so if I ran continuously until graduation, I would burn 495.5 thanksgiving dinners. This Friday night, 99 Nights, dinner for seniors, you'll get a glass of wine, if you're over 21!

Student life - I want to say thank you for a warm welcome. Moving forward, student life committee will be meeting tomorrow. Office hours: Tuesday and Thursday from 3-5 with extended hours this week Monday 6-7. That would be the best time for the misc. to come for an interview. I am very passionate about this position and I look forward to working with all of you. If you have any questions, come talk to me.

2017- freshmen class council looking to hold event forum/hot seat for freshmen to get information and ask questions December 10.

Academics - you still have time to tell me names of publications you want to see. I want to take a minute to knock for main because he's so supportive and appreciative.

Strong - well, as the official spreader of good cheer in this committee, any way back to me, I want to give knocks for everyone I know it's a stressful time this year. You're all doing a wonderful job. Danny love the hat scarf combo!

Raymond- not speaking as Raymond, speaking as me, I want to congratulate Danny. I know he's going to do a great job. I'll miss you coming to steal my vacuum. Back to being Raymond, my house is having an all house meeting to talk about biased incidences, wish me luck. If you have any advice, please tell me.

Jewett - when do we find out about founders day?

Act. - as the cochair, unofficial cochair, founders day themes are due on Tuesday. We will be notifying everybody either Tuesday evening or Wednesday afternoon.

Noyes- this Wednesday, Noyes is hosting our second campus event, in collaboration with joss cushing ths and res life and vsa, we're excited to have our first reality tv speaker to visit. If you guys can come and the misc. can promote it, it would be great.

Pres. - more just an internal thing, next week is our last council meeting for the semester.

We're going to meet at my TA (Strong - YESSS) it'll be a holiday party. We're doing a secret

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snowflake. It's a nice tradition. Before you leave, take a name, so we don't forget. My other thing was not important

Main - main is selling sweatpants. You should all support us.

Finance - finance committee is meeting this Wednesday

Jewett - speaking as a hype member, this week we're putting an event - Coke Red Moves, a movement where all you have to do is submit a YouTube video of you dancing with that hash tag (cokeredmoves), for Wed 8. For every 1000 videos, coke will donate money to children who were born with AIDS.

Strong - (...) I ran over a deer on my way here. The deer is not in good shape.