

Vassar Student Association Council
Agenda for March 28, 2010

Time: 7:00pm

Location: College Center 223

“Happiness is not a goal; it is a by-product.” --Eleanor Roosevelt

1. Call to Order
2. Attendance _____
Operations
3. Consent Agenda
 - a. Approval of the Minutes from 3/21
 - b. \$250 from Speakers, Lecturers to CHOICE
4. Committee Reports
 - a. BHP
5. Exec Reports
 - a. Activities
 - b. Finance
6. Allocation of \$800 from Speakers, Lecturers to CSA _____ Finance
7. Allocation of \$1500 from Speakers, Lecturers to CBS _____ Finance
8. Admin Review _____ Student Life
9. Open Discussion _____ Anyone
10. Adjourn

Fund Being Applied For: Speakers, Lecturers, and Panels Fund

VSA Organization: CHOICE

Name of Applicant: Faren Tang

Applicant E-mail Address: fatang@vassar.edu

Event Name: BDSM 102: Basic Rope Play with Suzanne SxySadist

Location of Event: Faculty Commons

Date of Event: April 1, 2010

Description of Event:

Bondage! It can be fun, sexy, and exciting so it's no wonder that it plays at least some part in more kinky sexual fantasies than almost any other activity. Yet if done incorrectly, it can be very dangerous. In this class Suzanne will cover some valuable basic safety info and then offer a hands-on workshop where she will cover some quick, easy to learn, but very useful and fun ties.

Benefit to Students:

This event furthers CHOICE's ongoing goal of increasing dialogue on sexual health and communication at Vassar College, and also gets people talking about alternative sexualities and the importance of communicative sex.

Costs of the Event (Itemize and Be Specific):

\$250 Speaker Fee

Total Cost of Event: \$250

Current Funding Plan (How will you help PAY for this event):

The only cost involved in this event is the speakers' fee, so that is the only expense we need to cover.

List of Attendees (First name, Last name, Class year - when relevant):

Collaborating Organizations and HOW they are contributing:

Amount Requested: \$250

Finance rec: \$250

Exec: \$250

Amount left in fund: \$3335

Fund Being Applied For: Speakers, Lecturers, and Panels Fund

VSA Organization: Caribbean Students' Alliance

Name of Applicant: Kristine Bell

Applicant E-mail Address: krbell@vassar.edu

Event Name: Carifest Week Film Screening

Location of Event: College Center MPR

Date of Event: 4/1/10

Description of Event:

Film screening and discussion of "Wah do Dem" with the executive producer, Daniel Murray and Director, Ben Chase. The film won the LA Film Festival Jury Award and it's been making the festival circuit. It stars Sean Bones (a Brooklyn reggae artist) and Norah Jones, the musician. The soundtrack features MGMT and Santigold in addition to a slew of reggae performers.

"Slight but winning and often funny, the scrappy Amerindie "Wah Do Dem" is a fish-out-of-water comedy driven by Sean "Bones" Sullivan's offbeat performance as a Brooklyn hipster in rural Jamaica without money or a passport. Picturesque even in grungy, handheld DV, this Los Angeles Film Festival jury prizewinner should certainly click with mumblecore aficionados. Yet its appeal seems a good deal broader, thanks to Bones, a bouncy soundtrack and a straightforward narrative odyssey in which a privileged American male learns some much-needed humility.

Indie distribs ought to take a gander."

Benefit to Students:

This film is an opportunity to showcase the island of Jamaica and the Caribbean culture in a positive light rather than focusing on the violence and inner city turmoils of the people. It will also be a fantastic opportunity for film majors to speak with an up and coming director about the world of Film production.

Costs of the Event (Itemize and Be Specific):

speaker's fee - \$500

accomodation - \$110

dinner - \$130

transportation - \$60

Total Cost of Event: \$\$800

Current Funding Plan (How will you help PAY for this event):

Currently we have a portion of our limited budget allotted to help pay for this event, however, we have lots of other events planned for the semester such as a cooking workshop, dinner, auction and art night, mug night, barbeque, roller skating.

List of Attendees (First name, Last name, Class year - when relevant):

Collaborating Organizations and HOW they are contributing:

Amount Requested: \$\$800

Description of Event:

The Cooking Workshop is the second event (Tuesday March 30) of our week long events of Carifest Week. The workshop will be led by Madeline Millan, an assistant Professor of Spanish at the Fashion Institute of Technology, SUNY. The workshop will begin with a 45 minute to an hour talk about cooking in film and literature in the Caribbean, then hands on cooking for the next 2 hours. She will be teaching and discussing the history of dishes such as

- 1) mangu
- 2) mofongo
- 3) sorullitos-corn fingers
- 4) arepas-corn crepes

Benefit to Students:

This workshop will give students the opportunity to learn and taste dishes of the Caribbean, thus giving them a glimpse of different aspects of the Caribbean. This is one step in our attempt to expose the campus to the diversity of the Caribbean.

Costs of the Event (Itemize and Be Specific):

Grocery List: \$160

Hotel accommodation one night Days Inn: \$80

Travel: \$20 local \$40 metro north

Speaking Fee: \$400

Total Cost of Event: \$700

Current Funding Plan (How will you help PAY for this event):

Carifest Week is a week long celebration of Caribbean culture put on by the Caribbean students on campus. The week runs from March 29 – April 3 and the cooking workshop is on the Tuesday. We have allotted a portion of our budget for all the events of the week. However, we have other activities planned for the rest of the semester such as off campus activities (Roller skating), an auction to raise funds for the Haiti Relief fund, and our annual dinner.

List of Attendees (First name, Last name, Class year - when relevant):

Collaborating Organizations and HOW they are contributing:

Amount Requested: \$700

Total amount request: \$1500

Finance rec: \$800

Exec rec: \$800

Amount left in fund: \$3335

Fund Being Applied For: Speakers, Lecturers, and Panels Fund

VSA Organization: Council of Black Seniors

Name of Applicant: Dyana Boxley

Applicant E-mail Address: dyboxley@vassar.edu

Event Name: The 19th Annual Baccalaureate Ceremony

Location of Event: Vassar Chapel

Date of Event: 05/22/2010

Description of Event:

Historically, the Baccalaureate Service has served as community recognition of Black seniors but is also a community celebration for all graduates and their families. The service was revived in 1991 by black seniors who believed that the service would add diversity to activities during Commencement Weekend. Over the past two decades the services have been extremely successful in bringing the campus community together. The service also honors graduates and the campus community through traditional African dance and messages from the college President and faculty members.

Benefit to Students:

This ceremony brings the Vassar community together. We invite everyone on campus to come and take part in this ceremony that promotes inclusion, acceptance and diversity. The keynote speaker provides incite and wisdom on life after graduation. She will be speaking about creating community and coalitions in this multicultural era. This is a very important message to pass on to the graduates.

Costs of the Event (Itemize and Be Specific):

Speaker's Cost: \$5000

Transport and Accommodation: \$1250

Total Cost of Event: \$6250

Current Funding Plan (How will you help PAY for this event):

We plan to fundraise through events that we will put on throughout the rest of the semester. We will also be selling candy in the college center. We will also be taking money out of other parts of our budget to try and supplement.

List of Attendees (First name, Last name, Class year - when relevant):

Graduating seniors and their families, faculty, staff, and members of the Poughkeepsie community at large.

Collaborating Organizations and HOW they are contributing:

Amount Requested: \$2,250

Finance rec: \$1500

Exec rec: \$1500

Amount left in fund: \$3335

**Vassar Student Association
Administrative Review, Fall 2009
Office of International Programs**

This academic year, the Vassar Student Association (VSA) Council focused its biannual Administrative Review on the Office of International Programs. Administrative Reviews allow the student government a regular chance to consider the role of different offices on campus, and to make policy suggestions from the students' point of view. In an increasingly globalized world, we see an obvious and increasing need for accessible and robust international programs. Among the myriad of skills required of graduates, few are more compelling than the ability to live and function productively outside of one's own culture. This can come in many forms, and entails overcoming countless barriers—linguistic, social, economic, and geographic, to name only a few.

We see international travel as an integral part of the Vassar educational experience. We are proud that so many Vassar students choose to study abroad, particularly during their junior years. About 43% of students undertake international study for one or more semesters, a number that roughly tracks Vassar's peer group.^[1] In the coming years, we would like to become a leader in this area, encouraging a greater proportion of our student body to embrace international travel and cross-cultural experience.

Overall, seniors who went abroad last year reported that their travel was among the most outstanding, memorable, and life-changing experiences of their Vassar education. Still, many expressed some concerns about the study abroad

process, both in terms of the approval and advising processes. In this review, we seek to outline some of those concerns to improve this core component of the College's educational mission. We will then offer some constructive suggestions for moving forward. We mean these only as reflections of student concern, and continue to appreciate the Office's thoughtful and committed staff.

1. **Accessibility:** The most common concern of students is the accessibility, broadly defined, of the International Programs Office. Student feedback showed the need for longer office hours and more consultation regarding different programs and the process for applying. Students said the lines to get into the office were long, and personnel were frequently absent from the office during the work day. Some students found it difficult to schedule meetings to discuss their interests and goals. However, when students were able to get this one-on-one time they found the conversations helpful. Furthermore, some students felt there was more emphasis on filling out forms and picking top choices than consultation. Students also expressed that the website can sometimes be confusing and there is no feedback about programs so individual consultation is made necessary to clarify procedures and discuss different programs candidly. Overall, students would like to see more personal support from the office during the process and feel more welcome to discuss the programs with the staff.
2. **Connection to Vassar's Advising Network:** There seems to be little or no communication between Vassar's network of academic advisers and the Office of International Programs. We feel that pre-major and major advisers should catalyze student interest in studying abroad from their first moments on campus. Planning to leave the country should be a standard aspect of conversations with academic advisers. Currently, most of these faculty members seem to know very little about study abroad programs and the process of approval for study abroad.
3. **Roles of Staff:** A large number of current seniors recall it being difficult to speak with the Office's Director. The responsibilities of the office staff did not appear to be clear cut, and students were often left wondering if they had been given the optimal amount of guidance on their planning. While input from the Administrative Specialist was helpful, students feel there need to be more opportunities to meet with the Office Director regarding matters such as the academic and social environments of the various abroad programs.
4. **Approval Process and Support Abroad:** Another concern was the lengthy process of "approval" for studying abroad. Students stressed that the bureaucracy—the idea that one had to "apply" for permission to apply to an actual program was excessive. After many conversations we have found that the study abroad process is self-selective and most, if not all, students who apply are approved. Many also thought the process of submitting exactly three programs for approval was frustrating as many students wished to apply to a fewer or greater number of programs. Others felt constrained by the Office's early deadline and wanted the option to change their mind later. The requirement of letters of recommendation and a student statement seem excessive as well, as students then have to request an additional letter of recommendation for their selected programs, which is time consuming for already heavily-burdened faculty and administrative recommenders. There has also been some concern that the approval process is rigorous and involved, but once the student is abroad there is really no communication between the Office and abroad students. Students who are abroad are not routinely asked if they are having good experiences, or if they need any help. It seems important that there should be some form of follow-up from Vassar with students to ensure they are safe, happy, and having the optimal study abroad experience. Sending the Miscellany News to on-site Vassar Program Offices, which is done now, does not sufficiently help students connect with the campus when they are abroad.

Based on these four common concerns, the VSA recommends the following for consideration by the Dean of the College, Dean of the Faculty, and Director of International Programs:

1. **The Office of International Programs should exist under the Dean of the Faculty rather than the Dean of the College.** We feel that this shift would allow far better communication with faculty in their capacities as advisers and teachers. Faculty should have regular communication with the Office, exchanging ideas about programs that could complement their coursework. The current structure markets study abroad as academic, but the College makes no connections (in most cases) between students' academic lives at Vassar and their academic lives at their host institutions abroad. The VSA would like to see each department work with the Office of International Programs to generate common lists of relevant programs for their majors. Departments should then present this information—through faculty advising, coursework, and majors committees—to students. Training for pre-major and major advisers should also include expectations that all faculty advisers have an understanding of the process and some knowledge of relevant programs. Too

often, we feel, faculty are left out of the process entirely. These obvious synergies would happen more naturally by moving the office under the Dean of the Faculty.

2. The Office of International Programs should expand its office hours, particularly for the Director.

Based on student feedback, we believe that the Office should expand its drop-in office hours. The Office of Career Development, for instance, has an effective system whereby students can either schedule an extended meeting or “drop-in” for a quick question or consultation. While the Career Development Office has a larger staff with which to operate this helpful system, it is our firm belief that the Office of International Programs should follow their example to whatever extent possible. Additionally, students strongly desire direct communication with the Director. Too often, we have found that students are prevented from speaking directly with the Director or are made to feel uncomfortable with attempting to schedule a meeting. This should not be the case. Those who are able to make appointments find feedback helpful—but those who cannot feel frustrated. The consensus, it seems, is that there needs to be a clearer delineation between the role of the Director and the Administrative Specialist. A more direct, and clearly explicated method of scheduling an appointment with the Director would alleviate some of the concerns around this matter.

3. The Office of International Programs should hire more Senior Interns. With so many students considering, applying, going, and returning from study abroad experiences, the Office of International Programs is understandably very busy. We feel that in light of the fact that many student concerns pertain to access to information, hiring more Senior Interns would be incredibly beneficial. Many students found the Senior Interns to be wonderful resources, in terms of giving personal insight to all aspects of study abroad. Students appreciate having an approachable peer who has not only gone through the process of applying, but has successfully studied abroad and returned to Vassar. In addition to being able to help answer student questions, we believe it would also be helpful to expand their role in the office to include online development. We feel strongly that it would be very valuable to students to have an online resource which focuses on student feedback in regard to specific programs. This resource would include the department lists of suggested programs, as well as student responses generated from student questionnaires, which are already being conducted but not used. Having an online resource which provides student feedback and reviews of programs would give students further detailed information about Vassar student abroad experiences and could help to alleviate the number of students trying to meet with the Director. Senior Interns could maintain this database, and in that way not add to the burden of the Office staff.

4. The Office of International Programs, in conjunction with the Dean of the Faculty and the Committee on Leaves and Privileges, should reconsider its approval process. We feel strongly that the current system of approval for study abroad could be much less time consuming for students, administrators, and faculty on the Committee on Leaves and Privileges. For all but two or three students each year, approval is essentially guaranteed. The Office’s application is very time consuming, and the comments of the Committee on Leaves and Privileges (which lightly encourage some students to take more coursework or consider certain programs) are non-binding and usually ignored. Currently many students spend as much time applying to Vassar for study abroad approval as they do applying to their actual programs. Therefore we would like to suggest that a formulaic approach, instead of a full application approach, would be a far more efficient way of determining study abroad eligibility. For example: “All Vassar students are eligible to spend a semester abroad at a foreign institution if a) their GPA exceeds a 3.0, b) their student records are free from any serious breaches of conduct, and c) they have had conversations (and acquired signatures) from the Director of International Programs and their major or pre-major adviser.” This system would concentrate approval and advising on the appropriate individuals—the Director and the student’s adviser—rather than on a joint committee.

The VSA appreciates the opportunity to evaluate campus offices, particularly one so centrally tied to the core values of the College. We sincerely hope that the points made in this review can become springboard for further discussion and catalysts for change. If there are any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

[1] Institute of International Education, “Annual Report,” October 2009. Vassar’s proportion of students studying abroad at some point during their academic careers is about on par with our traditional group of 21 peer colleges (about 2% lower than the mean).