

VSA Council Minutes

February 10, 2008

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:03 PM.

2. Attendance

Proxies: SoCo.

Guests: D.B. Brown, Michelle Cantos, Brian Farkas (Miscellany News), Kyle Giunta (Student Assistant to the President), Kristin Lee, Acacia O'Connor (Miscellany News), Raymon Parker, Ed Pittman (Campus Life), Teresa Quinn, Sam Rosen-Amy (Miscellany News), Jason Wu (ASA).

3. Consent Agenda

a. Minutes from February 3

No objections were made, and the consent agenda was adopted as presented.

4. Discussion with Deans and Directors

a. Presentation of Information

Wendy Freedman led a discussion among both administrators and Council members about the problematic use of alcohol on campus. She informed Council that the administration is concerned about the risks of binge drinking on campus, through which students are putting themselves at risk. She clarified that the administration did not initiate the discussion to deal with the issues of underage drinking or alcohol consumption at large, but rather to discuss the dangerous health ramifications of excessive alcohol consumption.

She began the discussion with a presentation of information being seen by administration, explaining that the BAC (Blood Alcohol Content) of students is used to determine their level of risk. A BAC of 0.02 - 0.1 is the level when students have reduced inhibitions, are relaxed, and are having fun; that level is not the concern of the administration. They are concerned with the higher BAC levels, which can lead to: vomiting, feeling emotionally numb, blackouts, losing control, and the potential for coma and death. The administration realizes that trends in alcohol use on campus can be misleading, and thus they are only concerned with the actual number of students that have had problems.

In Fall 2007, there were 130 EMS calls made for students who had consumed excess amounts of alcohol, and 80 of those calls were for intoxication. Most students ended up at Baldwin, but many also went to Saint Anderson and Vassar Brothers hospitals. The administration believes it's only a matter of luck that no students have been lost yet, and that it is only a matter of time until something worse happens.

Ms. Freedman then discussed the impact of this issue on students and on the Vassar community. Recovery after intoxication takes 48-72 hours, which will undoubtedly affect students' academics. For every ambulance needed for intoxicated students on campus, there is one less ambulance available to the greater Poughkeepsie community, who may need it. Students who are facing serious problems talk to Michelle Soucy for health consultations, and the amount of health consultations has increased dramatically. Furniture in the houses is moved and stolen, there is damage done to houses, and there is significantly higher amount of work for the cleaning staff. Additionally, 90% of sexual assaults occur alongside of alcohol consumption.

The administration is looking into changes that can be made on campus to avoid these sorts of problems. Some of the possible changes being discussed are a change in programming and merchandising, limited alcohol availability on campus, and an increase in enforcement of the college's alcohol policies. They wanted to discuss all of these changes, as well as ask for suggestions, from the VSA Council.

b. Questions

Council was then given time to ask clarifying questions about the information presented. THs asked whether there were any trends of alcohol-related problems in relation to Class years; the response was that there are most problems with freshmen, and that the amount of problems is almost in reverse order, signifying that there are less problems with more experienced students. Council was also informed that: the Good Samaritan rule was put in place three years ago, which may account for an increase in EMS calls; bigger and more organized parties have less alcohol-related problems, and that most problems occur with TA and TH parties; and that the repeat rate for EMS calls and hospital trips is very low, signifying that students tend not to have multiple alcohol-related problems.

c. Discussion

Council then engaged in a discussion with the administrators to discuss possible changes that could be made in order to effectively solve the problem of high alcohol consumption on campus. Jewett began the discussion by suggesting that while it would be incredibly difficult to change, the fact that Student Fellows cannot help their freshmen drink responsibly is problematic. Several members of Council discussed whether Student Fellows should be allowed to drink with their freshmen; in contrast to Jewett, Main expressed strongly that Student Fellows should not be allowed to drink with freshmen.

Council in general agreed about the difficulty of reaching all students with information about alcohol consumption, because there are so few mandates at Vassar. Main expressed concern about the effectiveness of AlcoholEdu, as it is not culturally applicable to the actual culture and problems specific to Vassar. Both administrators and members of Council agreed on the importance of peers encouraging responsible drinking in one another. Administrators also expressed concern that Class years selling merchandise of flasks, shot glasses, and mugs sent mixed messages to the student body regarding alcohol use.

2010 suggested bringing the medical aspect of alcohol intoxication into the discussion, in order to inform students about what happens when students have to go to the hospital. DB Brown suggested having EMTs going from dorm to dorm to talk to students about what they've seen when helping intoxicated students. Cushing asked what programming could take place during Orientation to talk to freshmen about the risks of alcohol, which might be similar to Gays of Our Lives and Sex and Sensibility. While Orientation included the "Just Say No" program, Cushing commented that it would be more effective if it featured first-hand experience, and did not take place on the first Friday that freshmen are on campus. Jewett commented that the fire-safety training during student leader training was very effective, and would recommend a similarly engaging program for alcohol education for freshmen.

Lathrop questioned how the brevity of Orientation affected alcohol consumption, and how administrators would know statistically that the problem is improving. The administrators commented that a behavioral change is noticeable after students go through punishment, which includes health consultations with Michelle Soucy, and that the Dean of Freshmen would notice a decrease in transferring freshmen from the alcohol culture on campus.

Student Life commented that there is not very little interaction between professors and students, and recommended re-engaging professors in the lives of students. He also suggested making the Two Week Rule more prominent for freshmen, expressing that the rule has had less of an impact on freshmen's choices in recent years. The President added that the personal aspect to alcohol education is incredibly important for the education of freshmen, and informed Council that having alcohol available at all-campus programming actually decreases the amount of alcohol-related problems.

5. Reports

a. Committee on College Life

A representative from CCL reported that the committee has had two meetings since they last reported. He first discussed the issue of gender-neutral housing; the committee decided that more discussion was needed across campus about the change, and they are currently in the process of getting more feedback. There was an article written for the Miscellany news, and the committee unanimously recommended the proposal. However, for the policy to be adopted the Board of Trustees must support it.

The new Town Houses may or may not be ready for next year, and there is no new news about their construction. The construction of Davison will go ahead as scheduled.

2011 questioned why the gender-neutral housing policy needed to be approved by the Board of Trustees and by senior officials. The representative responded that there is a larger constituency at Vassar and at the national level that may not understand the necessity for this specific change. Adopting a gender-neutral housing policy changes the image of the campus, and anything that affects Vassar's image in publicity needs to be approved by a larger number of people.

The representative also explained that there is some difficulty in the timing of getting the policy approved for next year, because the necessary committee on the Board of Trustees will only be meeting on certain dates. JJ Jackson will have to have a conversation with the Board of Trustees, and the policy could possibly go up for referendum. The issue is involved with media relations and public relations. In terms of a specific deadline, if CCL is able to come up with something by February 25, then there is a chance that the policy is implemented this year. The problematic issue is that by the May trustees meeting, room draw will have already happened.

b. Student Wellness Advisory Committee

No one was present from SWAC to give a report.

c. Drug and Alcohol Advisory

A representative from the Drug and Alcohol Advisory Committee reported that the college has signed on to use AlcoholEdu for four more years, because it is the only program that emphasizes education rather than intervention, and includes a portion for non-drinkers. The committee feels that it is the best choice for education of the effects of alcohol. A member of Council asked whether there are any portions of AlcoholEdu that can be tailored to Vassar's culture, and the representative responded that there are very few options to manipulate the program to be more specific. Operations also questioned whether AlcoholEdu is really the only option, and the representative responded that the majority of liberal institutions use AlcoholEdu in a similar fashion as Vassar.

The committee is currently drafting an Early Arrival Statement for students who arrive at school early. The statement would be used to enforce alcohol policies, would explain that arriving early is a privilege, and would create punishments for problems occurring with early arrival students. 2010 cautioned the committee from using the

"privilege" tactic for the Early Arrival Statement, and Activities added that many students who are athletes and student leaders are required to be on campus early. Student Life suggested providing a letter to students discussing previous problems with early arrival, and possibly discussing the Two Week Rule.

The committee is also crafting a drug survey for the student body, which will be sent out to students by April. Jewett requested sending out the survey earlier in the year, and the representative agreed to discuss the issue.

d. ResLife Advisory

The ResLife Advisory is currently concerned with the room draw policy in relation to Davison residents. There will be a two-part room draw: it will be determined for each house the number of slots open for Davison residents, and Davison residents will then participate in a "house draw" in order to choose which house to move into; afterward, each house will conduct a normal room draw with their new residents from Davison. Additionally, Davison residents will be able to take one person with them into their new house, in order to assure that Davison residents do not end up alone. Council then engaged in a discussion regarding the process of Davison residents taking another resident with them. The representative from RLAC clarified that the Class of 2010 will not be guaranteed singles, and that room draw for doubles and triples will occur at the same time as for singles.

RLAC will also be discussing the issues of gender-neutral housing, alcohol consumption in dorms, and the relationship between VSA and ResLife student leaders.

e. Exec Report (Student Life)

Student Life reported that despite their construction delays, the new Town Houses would be very nice, and that after its renovation Davison will be beautiful. There will be a study room on each floor of Davison. He is currently reading through five proposals for new food service companies, although he is unable to disclose any information about the companies or the proposals. Additionally, the Class Issues Alliance is forming survey questions, which will then be relayed to Inclusion and Excellence.

Jewett asked whether the cost of bathrooms in Davison could be cut to improve the plans for the basement, and Student Life responded that the two costs are simply not on the same scale financially. He then explained that the basement of Davison will be cleaned up and carpeted, the walls will be painted, and there will be seven laundry machines instead of the current five.

f. Transportation

Activities announced that starting Monday, Vassar College has a transportation system available to students. He presented members of Council with the Shuttle Map and the breakdown of its routes, which will run Monday through Friday, from 2-7pm. He also announced that this transportation system is a trial run, and depending on its success can either be expanded or shut down for next year. The system will track the names of students traveling and for what purpose they are using it. He also reported that the system would not be stopping at the train station or Stop and Shop, despite expressed desire from the student body.

Main commented that the shuttle will be driving only five blocks from the train station, and that it would be very easy for the train station to be added to the route. Academics asked how the system is being publicized, and Activities responded that there are maps at the InfoDesk and by the work-study bulletin board, there will be posters in the dorm this week, and that President Hill sent out an all-campus email. 2010 asked whether guests would be allowed to ride, and Activities was uncertain.

Many members of Council then expressed concern that the pilot program is unrelated to the transportation needs of most students. Cushing wanted to express to the administration that the system would be ineffective in its routes and hours to the majority of students. 2011 expressed disappointment that the pilot program is completely different than next year's possible expansion of the transportation system. In response to Council's concern, Activities explained that the college is making decisions about the transportation system for financial reasons, and not to ultimately provide adequate recreational support to students. Council also discussed the lack of signs in the Poughkeepsie area denoting shuttle stops.

6. Announcement of Fines

Finances announced that Town Students have been fined \$25? under Article x Section x of VSA Bylaws. Finances also announced that the following organizations have been fined \$50 for failure to complete their Ideal Budget forms: Contrast and Eating Disorder Outreach.

7. Allocation of \$1134.25 from Conference to ASA

Finances moved to allocate \$1134.25 from the Conference Fund to ASA. All of Council voted in favor of the allocation, and the motion passed.

8. Allocation of \$900 from Hosting to SASA

Finances moved to allocate \$900 from the Hosting Fund to SASA. All of Council voted in favor of the allocation, and the motion passed.

9. Appointment of Sean Koerner as Noyes VP

Operations moved to appoint Sean Koerner as the Noyes Vice President. All of Council voted in favor of the appointment, and the motion passed.

10. Declaration of Open Positions

Operations moved to declare open the following positions: one Science Facility Planning position, one Board of Elections co-chair, and four Board of Elections members. Academics made note that the Science Facility Planning position should be a student who is multidisciplinary and an upperclassman. All of Council voted in favor of the declaration, and the motion passed.

Operations subsequently moved to declare up for appointment one Science Facility Planning position, one Board of Elections co-chair, and four Board of Elections members. All of Council voted in favor of the declaration, and the motion passed.

11. Open Discussion

- 2008 announced that 105 days remain until commencement, and that 100 Nights will take place this Friday. The event will include champagne, an alternative to champagne, and a performance by GirlTalk in the Villard Room. Council then engaged in a discussion about attendance issues of GirlTalk, including the total capacity of the Villard Room.
- There will be a Founder's Day meeting on Tuesday at 4:30 in Sander's Classroom.
- Main announced that the Seven Deadly Sins party will take place on Saturday night.

12. Adjourn

The meeting concluded at 9:48.