

VSA Council Minutes
February 15, 2009

1. Call to Order

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

2. Attendance

Proxies: 2009.

Absent: Operations.

Guests: Andrew Bennett (Student Asst. to the President), Matthew Brock (Misc), Brian Farkas (Misc), Julianne Herts (Misc), Emma Mitchell (Misc), Molly Turpin (Misc), Ruby Cramer (Misc), Kat Mehocic (Misc), Samuel Black (EMS), Kathleen Mehocic (Misc), Chelsea Dahl (Campus Patrol), Zak Ratajczak (Campus Patrol), Jay Leff (Hip Hop 101), Chelsea Kelly (CCET), Jeremy Bright (Misc), Jared Augenstein (ProHealth), Aubrey Wynn (Sustainability), Sarah Craig (Vassar Greens), Amy Seslowsky (Helicon), Jackson Kroopf (CAFA).

3. Campus Well-Being Discussion

The President explained that several members of the administration were present to discuss issues relevant to campus well-being, specifically drugs, alcohol and security. Each administrator introduced themselves and briefly outlined their major concerns. D. B. Brown, Dean of Students, explained that he is worried about alcohol, civility, community, and safety. Rich Horowitz, Assistant Director of ResLife, expressed his desire to explore ways in which the college can cultivate mindful behavior among students. Sylvia Balderrama, Director of the Counseling Service, claimed she was most concerned with students' high stress levels and lack of sleep. Chris Roellke, Dean of the College, spoke about student decision-making and the importance of mature choices to high-quality student life. Kim Squillace, Associate Director of Campus Security, was focused on how to work better with students, while Don Marsala, Director of Campus Security, was worried about safety, incivility, and poor decision-making on campus. Renee Pabst, Director of Health Education, emphasized stress and anxiety, substance use and abuse, and disordered eating. Wendy Freedman, Assistant Director of the Counseling Service, identified students' overall well-being as a key issue, and echoed Renee's concerns about high stress levels. Lisa Reticker, of Health Services, was especially focused on the *physical* consequences of stress and anxiety (illness, flus, coughs, insomnia, etc.).

Chris Roellke and Kim Squillace noted that, while security officers can be powerful educators, "sometimes safety trumps education". Roellke elaborated that student safety and well-being is "a collective responsibility", and that a promising new Security Advisory Committee has been established. While she sees The Mug as a positive student environment, the VP for Activities was concerned that "there aren't many [other] models of responsible behavior on campus", and she encouraged Vassar to introduce "alternative programming". D. B. Brown asserted the efficacy of peer-to-peer education, and explained that the college is exploring the notion of integrating the drug and alcohol-focused portion of orientation into dorm programming later in the semester. TAs was quite worried about women walking around the campus at night; she also asserted that the current party regulations were somewhat "irrational" (one half-keg for fifty students of legal drinking age), and that security should have a clearer handbook for handling students caught underage drinking. THs echoed TAs concerns about ResLife's party policies and about the safety of walking the campus after dark, claiming that the lighting

surrounding many pathways is inadequate. She also identified drug abuse as a major issue, and expressed concern that many students and administrators focus too heavily on alcohol when discussing substance use.

Responding to some of TAs comments, Chris Roellke explained that there are “natural differences” among security officers in terms of how they conduct business. Kim Squillace elaborated that, though officers are taught to be sensitive to students’ individual circumstances, they cannot and *should* “not use discretion when it comes to violating college regulations”. Roellke also noted that Vassar has created a new landscape master plan that will improve lighting, paths, etc.; while the current financial climate imposes limitations on this plan, the college will be carrying out more moderate changes in the short term.

Noyes was concerned about recent vandalism in residence halls, and felt that it was “tied to alcohol and the campus culture”. He agreed with D. B. Brown and Renee Pabst that the peer-to-peer connection is “a very valuable teaching tool”; as such, he asserted that the college should allow more parties in senior housing areas so that older students can help underclassmen “learn healthy, safe drinking habits for college and life”. Renee Pabst commented that, physiologically, incoming students have a lower tolerance to alcohol than do older students, so peer-to-peer learning of this nature might not be effective. Rich Horowitz and D. B. Brown responded that Vassar is trying to encourage students to develop their abilities to think critically, and that students should already be using “cost/benefit” analyses to make mature decisions. Roellke felt that changing party regulations according to Noyes’ suggestions might mean treading a “slippery slope”. He explained that he is “not into [measures] that are more permissive”, and that Vassar is “handcuffed to some extent by the law”.

Student Life was concerned about the efficacy using Alcohol Edu; Pabst responded that the program has been “proven to work at other colleges”, and that it was important that students have access to this kind of educational information. Roellke echoed this sentiment, claiming that exposing freshmen to Alcohol Edu is both educational and beneficial from a liability perspective. He also noted that it might be possible to make the program somewhat more Vassar-specific by adding a few questions that are more relevant to campus life.

Rich Horowitz noted that security has a unique, challenging set of responsibilities at a school like Vassar because students do not have a “student/paraprofessional authority figure from ResLife” (i.e. an RA) who helps with discipline issues. Kim Squillace claimed that, as security rarely receives support from the local police, the college’s officers have “a huge role”; she continued that Campus Security is “charged with [the] huge responsibility of making sure everyone is safe, and we take this responsibility to heart”.

Chelsea Dahl, of Campus Patrol, outlined some of the duties of student patrollers: travel the pine path northwest of the tennis courts, as well as the path west of Sunset lake and the path to the THs, patrol every half hour, lock approximately 18 or 19 buildings each night, complete medical transports to reduce the load upon security, provide nightly escorts. As Campus Patrol alerts B&G to areas where the lights are unexpectedly out, Chelsea suggested that B&G be integrated into some of these discussions of Campus Security and student safety at nighttime. Chelsea continued that she does not “think Campus Patrol is visible enough”, and encouraged students and administrators to devise suggestions about how to make CP more accessible.

Ferry was concerned with the “sex and relationship culture on campus”, claiming that the issue is “intrinsically tied” to drugs and alcohol, mental well-being and student safety. She felt that there is a “frightening sense of female disempowerment on campus” and was curious about ways in which the student body and administration might positively “shift the culture at Vassar”.

The President responded that the VSA shares Ferry's concerns, and that the Executive Board has been working "to stymie" some events (e.g. Scantly Clad, Pimps n' Hos) that it deems unhealthy. Sylvia Balderrama expressed her belief that these problems stem from the institution's inability to discuss issues of sexuality in a frank, mature and sober fashion.

2011 claimed that he would like to see security regulations be more consistent across situations, and that his constituents feel officers' conduct varies "too much on a case by case basis". He wondered about the efficacy of write-ups and encouraged Security to explore alternatives. Additionally, he questioned the transparency of Metcalfe's services and the relevance of material presented in drug/alcohol classes. Kim Squillace reasserted that security officers are not in charge of the judicial side of things, and that they should always be behaving in the same fashion (responding to and documenting violations of college regulations). Renee Pabst explained that Metcalfe is looking for suggestions about how best to reach students, and would welcome any recommendations.

The VP for Activities affirmed the significance of having a positive, social campus culture; the President explained that the Exec Board has recently "taken a more active role in the programming department", attempting to structure events ways that encourage students to have safer, healthier experiences. He claimed that there were "a number of events last year where alcohol became a big issue", and after taking "a close look at GirlTalk and Scantly Clad", Exec has instituted tips training for student leaders hosting parties on campus and structured new food and beverage requirements for campus events. Both the President and Renee Pabst stressed the need for compromise between students and administrators, and asserted the importance of finding "common ground" among the two groups.

4. Consent Agenda

a. Allocation of \$300 from Conference Fund to Vassar Greens

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

5. Reports

a. Committee Report - CAFA

Jackson Kroopf, of CAFA, noted that the committee had its first meeting on Friday. Discussions focused on how the breakdown of males and females in the applicant and accepted students pools translate freshmen classes with gender ratios of 40:60. Numbers of students of color in Vassar's Early Decision applicant pool have increased, and the committee is currently exploring international and local recruiting practices, as well as "how Vassar is presented" publicly. Additionally, CAFA will soon be bringing in a mock committee "to look at past applications and how they are evaluated", and will be looking more closely at "how [the college is] deciding what makes a successful student at Vassar".

b. Committee Report – Sustainability

Aubrey Wynn, Sustainability rep, explained that the committee has recently been working a great deal on "Recyclemania". The project entails weighing bottles, cans and paper waste recycling over a period of four weeks and comparing Vassar's statistics to those of area colleges. The committee will also be hosting the "All-Campus Energy Challenge" in April. Aubrey also noted that Sustainability is currently "working on getting CFL lighting in all senior housing" areas, but that these light bulbs are available to all students at the ROC.

c. Committee Report – CCET

Chelsea Kelly, CCET's representative, noted that the committee is finishing up a proposal from last semester to re-form "CCET" into "CAT", and will soon provide a report to the Board of Trustees. CCET will also begin addressing the results of the campus technology survey. The committee is in the midst of deciding whether to switch from Blackboard to Moodle, and will be evaluating a demo version of Moodle in the near future.

d. Exec Report – Student Life

The VP for Student Life announced that he visited Davsison House last week, and that he was impressed by the renovations. He felt that, among other things, the new cupolas and new windows on the fourth floor were positive improvements. Renovations will be "substantially complete" by June 29th, and should be entirely finished a few weeks later. He noted that Raymond residents have had some issues with noise complaints, and B&G will soon be meeting with the House Team to address these concerns. In terms of the Meal Plan, Student Life is exploring ways in which to retool catering policies so that students can continue donating points (food) to organizations in need. Additionally, the VP for SL is trying to increase the number of guest/flex meals that each student is given per semester; he hopes that perhaps students might be able to donate some of these meals if their regular meal points become off-limits. With CIE, he has been working on summer internships; he explained that "interest is there on both the student and alum sides", and that the committee "just needs to coordinate" things. Student Life is also interested in increasing the presence of off campus vendors, and hopes to institute Saturday pizza nights, among other new initiatives.

5. Allocation of \$1675 from Speakers/Lectures/Panels to Helicon

The VP for Finance moved to allocate \$1675 from Speakers/Lectures/Panels to Helicon for "A Native American Storyteller Visits Vassar" on April 6th. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

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

The VP for Finance moved to allocate \$3200 from Speakers/Lectures/Panels to QCVC for "Pouring Tea: Black Gay Men of The South Tell Their Tales" on April 16th. All were in favor of the allocation, and the motion passed.

7. Allocation of \$750 from Conference Fund to MEChA

The VP for Finance moved to allocate \$750 from the Conference Fund to MEChA for its National Association For Chicana and Chicano Studies Conference. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

8. Allocation of \$855 from Conference Fund to ProHealth

The VP for Finance moved to allocate \$855 from the Conference Fund to ProHealth for its Global Health Conference. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

9. Allocation of \$1500 from Conference Fund to Vassar Greens

The VP for Finance moved to allocate \$1500 from the Conference Fund to Vassar Greens for Powershift 2009. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

10. Allocation of \$1496 from Conference Fund to French Club

The VP for Finance moved to allocate \$1496 from the Conference Fund to the French Club for the VCU French Film Festival. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

11. Allocation of \$1000 from Mid-Hudson Valley Fund to Hip Hop 101

The VP for Finance moved to allocate \$1000 from the Mid-Hudson Valley Fund to Hip Hop 101 for Black Heritage Day. All were in favor, and the motion passed.

12. Open Discussion

- 2009 announced that 98 days remained until graduation.

13. Adjourn

The meeting concluded at 9:56 PM.