

VSA Council Minutes
September 20, 2009

1. Call to Order

The Meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM

2. Attendance

Proxies: 2013

Late: Cushing

Guests: Stephanie Mischell, Jill Scharr (Misc), Matt Brock (Misc), Eric Estes (Misc), Molly Turpin (Misc), Ruby Cramer (Misc), Liz Jordan (Misc), Jerry Gilligan (Iced Brew)

3. Consent Agenda

a. Approval of the Minutes from 9/6, 9/13

There were no objections and the motion passed.

b. \$500 from Speakers, Lectures and Panels Fund to Unbound

There were no objections and the motion passed.

4. Announcements

a. Meet Me In Poughkeepsie

The VP for Activities announced that yes, Meet Me In Poughkeepsie is happening and that it will be on the 10th of October. Beyond that, he informed council that registration begins Thursday the 24th and he encouraged everyone to sign up.

5. Reports

a. Activities Report

The VP for Activities reported that he had been incredibly busy working on new bylaws, an activities fair and, on top of everything, figuring out his job. He felt that the activities fair had been incredibly successful and was glad to see the turnout. He informed council that much of his time was currently spent working on Leadership for Change, a program designed to further leadership training throughout the year. The activities committee had met for the first time the prior week and had reviewed the new set of bylaw changes.

b. Academics Report

The VP for Academics began by outlining her goals for the year. She hopes to rework the CEQ's, invigorate the major's committees as well as look into a possibility of peer advising, linking Freshmen with upperclassmen. Currently she is trying to work on availability and class meeting times. In addition, there has been talk about a Social Consciousness requirement, and Academics implored council to send her suggestions.

Academics informed council that currently there is an attempt to cut \$2 million from teacher's salaries. In response to Raymond's question about publicity and student voice, she informed council that the process of teacher's salaries was an issue not open to student input.

6. Discussion on the Point System

Student life opened the floor to discussion on the adoption of a point system as a means of measuring student violations. Jewett immediately raised the main concern of the evening, that this new method was way too impersonal, and too strict, making it too easy to get on probation.

Strong, however, countered that his was a step in the right direction, but at the current time it was too ambiguous. Town Houses agreed, stating that his method would allow for students to know where they stood in relation to probation, unlike the current system that keeps students standing hidden. Joss agreed, saying that with the current punitive system, students don't know what will happen when they meet with a house advisor. The President of the VSA interrupted to point out that this new system would relieve strain from currently overburdened House Advisors.

Jewett introduced an alternative solution that had been discussed in BHP, where, instead of assigning points, the system would be consequence based stating if "this is what you do, then this is the consequence." Davison agreed.

The VP of Student Life agreed with the concerns raised by council and pointed to schools like Hamilton and Gettysburg as examples of schools with extra consequences such as fines. She felt that in the case of vandalism, and added fine could help discourage negative activity.

2011 felt that a more stringent regulation could exist in cases of dorm damage and vandalism. He stated that people will get drunk, no matter what, but not every student engages in destructive behavior. Terrace Apartment were quick to point out that higher level offenses already meet with the judicial board and that assigning a point system would bypass the student half of the judicial process.

2013 reiterated the impersonal nature of the process, encouraging council to address the issue in terms of consequences, not a nebulous number. Operations on the other hand, felt that there was a nice amount of transparency that arose with the addition of a point system. It would also increase efficiency in dealing with large situations, such as a party where large numbers of students would have to meet with the house advisor.

Cushing felt that there should still be meetings for offenses that occur within the house as they effect the life of everyone living in the dorm. Main pointed out that house advisors already have the ability to screen their meetings, thus limiting the amount of work that they tackle.

The VP of Academics assured council that making the security system harsher was not the intent of the system. She also worried that currently the system is incredibly ambiguous and that a new system would make violations very clear. 2010 agreed that standardization was good.

The TAs worried that this system could miss problem students. Raymond agreed, noting that repeat offenders have an underlying problem and the current system helps catch those students and get them help. 2012 noted that a point system could actually make it easier for administrators to notice problem students, as trends would emerge. TH also noted that this would not remove "human nuance," quite the contrary it would make things clearer to students, both as a reminder of consequences, and as where they stood. Activities reminded people that the option to meet with a House Advisor in case of a disagreement was still available.

Town Students suggested going to system of no legislation such as found at Haverford. The President reminded her that without a policy, we would be subject to NY State Law and that recently Haverford was raided.

Finance responded to the idea that these should only be for drug and alcohol offenses, wondering why vandalism shouldn't fall under the point system. Noyes felt that there should always be a meeting for larger offenses. Main also felt that the system, when dealing with higher level violations, approaches a fine line of dehumanization, noting that there is a difference between trashing a room and rape.

Raymond also felt that limiting the point system to drugs and alcohol would free up time for the House Advisors, but still allow them to meet with higher level, less common, offenses.

The President quickly took a straw poll to see if council would be interested in continuing this discussion through the year. With a vote of 19-5, council voted in favor of continued discussion.

7. Appointment of Joseph Carver to SoCo Treasurer

Operations made a motion to appoint Joseph Carver to SoCo Treasurer. The motion passed, all in favor.

8. Allocation of \$400 from Mid-Hudson Valley Fund to Iced Brew

Finance moved to allocate \$400 to Iced Brew for their Friday Night Skate event. Raymond wondered why, in Finance, \$1,000 had been allocated to Iced Brew, but the exec recommendation had been changed to \$400. Finance informed him that special purpose funds were for one time events and that served as a trial run.

Gerry, the President of Iced Brew, informed council that this was a way to teach people to skate. In addition, the coach would be on-hand to give pointers on form.

The motion came to vote and passed, all in favor.

9. Allocation of \$1,600 from Conference Fund to Pro Health

Finance moved to allocate \$1,600 to ProHealth to attend an AIDS awareness conference. The conference would allow them to gain information on how AIDS is affecting the world. All were in favor and the motion passed.

10. Allocation of \$1,800 from Conference Fund to Vassar Greens

Finance moved to allocate \$1,800 to The Vassar Greens to attend a biannual, international conference on Green innovation. All were in favor and the motion passed.

11. Addition to Article IV, Section 25 of the VSA Bylaws

The VP of Activities made a motion to adopt a set of bylaw changes that would give council the ability to punish organizations for unsatisfactory conduct off-campus. In addition, it would require that each org fill out a contact sheet, a demand already required by the Dean of Students.

2010 thanks Activities for listening to council and making the changes they requested. TS asked if a contact form was required every time they went off campus. Activities informed her that this was a policy of the Dean of Students. Academics reiterated that this was not a change of expectations, just a clarification about what happens if students violate policy.

The came to a vote and passed 21-1, with Town Students opposing.

12. Open Discussion

2010 informed council that there were 244 days until graduation.

Operations moved to amend Article 3, Section 3, Part 3. All were in favor and the motion passed.

Town students raised concerns that Robert's rules were very confusing for people involved in council, as well as people watching and recommended that council abandon them in favor of colloquial language. In addition, she felt that real names should be used instead of constituency names, citing the fact that we refer to President Hill as "Cappy." TS then raised concerns about communication between exec and council. Finally she felt that finances and bylaws were unimportant and should not be discussed in council, but that really issues should be debated.

Cushing reminded Town Students that the point of using constituency names was to remind the office holder that they represented, not themselves, but their constancy base. This sentiment was echoed by TH's and Main, who pointed out that it allows for council members to separate personal feelings from council.

Operations pointed out that Robert's rules, as well as the name issue, are written in to the bylaws and would require a change. In addition, he pointed out that most bylaw discussion happens behind the scenes in CRC.

Student Life pointed out that many conversations take place in committee she encourage TS to attend committees who discussed issues important to her. The President echoed this, encouraging her to submit resolution or proposals about issues.

Finance pointed out that the finances of the VSA are the only aspect of student life that the VSA has direct control over. He felt that it would be illogical and suspect to grant the entire power of the purse to one individual. Finance also encouraged TS to go meet with administrators herself.

Noyes raised concerns that there was no training to inform council members the process to submitting proposals. Academics responded that they were working on making the process more open, which included answering burning questions like "what does that knocking mean?" THs agreed that people should be more informed.

Raymond asked if there was anyway to help council know what is going on in committee.

13. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 8:37