

# VASSAR STUDENT ASSOCIATION

## Council Minutes for September 30, 2012

"It wasn't about winning the title. I just wanted to give the best performance I could"  
-Katharine McPhee

- 1 Call to Order
  - The meeting was called to order at 7:03 p.m.
- 2 Attendance.....Operations
  - All here.
- 3 Consent Agenda
  - a. \$698.60 from Capital to Iced Brew
  - b. \$571.25 from Capital to Ultimate Frisbee
  - c. \$1,220.40 from the Conference Fund to Iced Brew
  - d. \$430 from the Speakers, Lectures, and Panels Fund to Iced Brew
  - e. \$700 from the Speakers, Lectures, and Panels Fund to MICA
  - All adopted.
- 4 Forum with Rich Horowitz, Associate Director of Residential Life.....(45 min)
  - Rich Horowitz is responsible for housing and student conduct. He works with the Vassar Sorting Hat primarily during the summer, but also with students who come back from JYA etc. He also figures out house changes and how many people are in each house. The majority of his time during the year is spent on student conduct.
  - Student Life asked about who chooses whether an issue goes through the Student Judicial Board or administrators. He decides this. He helped to create the Judicial Board about 3 years ago because they thought it was a good idea to have student input in the process; it exists to give students a greater voice in terms of student conduct. For example, they see what happens during the weekend, try to find interesting cases and send them towards the Judicial Board. He tries not to give them cases that involve a lot of people or are TH cases because of class differences and to avoid uncomfortable situations. They have to give the judicial panel each case's history so they know what to base allegations on. The student conduct panel determines 'responsible' or 'not responsible' and then decides repercussions. Sanctions are based on student conduct history and the incident.
  - Operations asked about student housing for JYA students. He said this is tricky because they change up until November/December. Inevitably they have a lot more people coming in than going out; the disparity is around 120, and last year they had 100 vacancies. He's in touch with the JYA students as early as October. He offers them the vacancies in the apartments; placing them there makes his job a lot simpler. The same goes for suites. Ultimately, he tries to identify where the JYA students lived before; he likes to give their past residence priority. Juniors are always prioritized for singles. Everyone who was a first year student goes in a double if they're changing dorms. The goal is to put as many people in the apartments without having to put students together randomly. For example, there

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may be 13 spaces in Joss and 26 students who are coming back and want to live there; that's where it's challenging.

-2015 asked if you can request a student conduct panel as opposed to administrator evaluation. Not usually, but he is open to the idea. They would need more students involved in the process if this were to happen. With the current system, he can usually only get 4-5 students to participate. An idea he has is to create a set block every week so judges could plan for it.

-2015 asked about Room Draw and problems last year with students not having enough space in their dorms. Last year there were some rooms that should have been put on the list that weren't. Some were related to Post-back stuff. Noyes and Joss had the biggest issues. Human error was the major problem; the posting of available rooms was where big mistakes were made. House Advisors are always prepared with emergency rooms that can be opened up; this worked as it should have. He doesn't think that anyone that would have gotten a single actually got a double.

-2015 asked about wellness housing and the application process for it. As far as he knows, everyone who wanted Wellness got it and that's usually the case. He really likes wellness and it's been a popular thing for students.

-Finance asked about the initial sorting of students and why our application is so much shorter than other processes. He wonders if those schools with long lists are looking for a match or a complimentary person. He's heard that people who are so similar to their roommates are not as likely to not work out as people who aren't similar. Smoking is very important and single sex rooms. Sleep patterns is another big thing and cleanliness; someone who is extremely clean shouldn't be in a room with someone who is extremely dirty. It's not random; he loves pairing people from different states and international and national students. Female and male breakdown is considered for Fellow groups; they are very intentional about how many males and how many females are in each group.

-Joss has noticed that there have been quite a few cases of violent dorm damage and wanted to know if Rich feels that it's a normal year or not. There have been smashed doors and urinals in different dorms. These are sent from security to them and they investigate; if they can't find a culprit it's dropped. It's a serious concern. You can anonymously report these damages and this is so important because administrators aren't on campus all the time.

-Cushing expressed concern about students being put in a house in wellness instead of non-wellness in their own house without being asked which is more important to them. Rich said that students always have the power to tell them what they want and don't want. They never move students against their will. They always tell them that wellness is filled up and give them the option to move. Even with house changes, they can change them back.

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-Activities asked how much Rich believes in the effect of the magic question. He has to defer to the Vassar Sorting Hat for that. He sometimes notices, but doesn't put a lot of stock in it, rather it's just a funny thing to ask. Love and Spoonfuls is a good song too.

-Strong asked if Strong will remain all female in the foreseeable future and why? As far as he knows, it will stay this way. In past years there have been issues with filling it, but this year it's packed. The desire to be there is there so they aren't going to change it.

-Operations wanted to say that her freshman roommate was perfect. She wants to talk about getting rid of dorm stereotypes. She was wondering about the blurb sent out about each house once you're sorted. He's open to changing those. The only intention behind them is making them rhyme. Noyes has a bit of a quirky reputation and that's addressed in the poem. He thinks looking over these again might be good.

-Maine asked about the TVE assignments. International students used to all live in Noyes. That changed about 5 years ago because they decided to integrate the international students. They've talked about that for the TVEs too, but the unified hall also gives them a stronger support network and they have fellows who can live with them all together.

-2016 asked about the possibility of having whole floors of the same sex. At some schools you're given three choices so students choose. They're looking into housing software that might make this possible here. There are many things to consider—this software will revolutionize the process of housing.

-He handed out the student sanctions worksheet about the measures taken due to certain actions. He based these sanctions on what the College Regulations Panel had done in the past. The thing he pointed out is the part that says outcomes could possibly exceed what is written below. They've received a lot of coverage and that's why he felt everyone should get a copy.

-Finance had one more question about sanctions; how many reassignments this year? Normally it's around 7-8. There was an incident in Lathrop where 3-4 people were charged at the same time, so it varies. Suspensions/expulsions: 8. This past year, more incidents seem to merit this than normal. There were 3 students removed from housing.

-Town Students asked about the new software program. He can't remember what it's called, but it can also provide a venue to allow incoming students to meet each other anonymously before arrival. Part of the reliance on alcohol is using it as the social lubricant to start the year; if they provide a way to do this without alcohol, it can have an impact on the community. He did this once years ago all on paper. Questions such as Do you want a study buddy, racket ball partner, significant other? were put on the survey so people could get to know each other.

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-The initial sanction for harassment is probation, but for sexual harassment it’s warning. They went through this with the Judicial Board and they got a lot of feedback. Some of the specifics on the sheet may have changed since this feedback. A lot of the charges are completely related to your imagination; any particular violation is open to interpretation. It’s not good for students if there’s a direct punishment that’s tied to certain actions. He’s not quite sure, but his guess is this disparity in harassment sanctions probably has to do with things like a smack on the butt because it can be seen as sexual harassment to some and not to others.

-2015 asked if the sanctions sheet is available online. It’s not, but he’s open to sharing it if anyone asks and that’s why he handed it out to everyone today. He shares everything with Batia even though it goes through him beforehand. He’s happy to send it out—there’s nothing too confidential or unfair.

### 5 Executive Board Reports

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

-The Student Space Committee is moving along. They are going to have meetings with all house teams and they’ve had students in UpC and the College Center getting feedback. This weekend they met with Charlie Dobb who will help put together the focus groups. They put together questions and an outline. After October Break they will be setting those up.

-Last he checked, 500 students had used Turbo Vote.

-This afternoon, the Executive Board met with many of the Alana Organizations to talk about the Council meeting where MEChA’s fund application was considered. It’s a difficult conversation to have, but he feels it’s very important and good to move toward dialogue when there are issues like this. They’re still in the planning stages of what kind of action they are going to take and how they might change the way Council handles things.

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

-Freshmen Elections are over. Over 50 freshmen ran. Thank you everyone for helping, getting the word out, etc.

-Founders Day Co-chair applications are due tonight at midnight; they’d like to see a few more applications. She’s really excited about this. Ideally they’ll be appointing them next week.

-In Operations Committee they’ve been talking about making the VSA Council more accessible and open to all. All at large members are welcome to come to Operations meetings to discuss these issues, not this week, but next.

### 6 Meet Me in Poughkeepsie Update.....Activities (5 min)

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-Meet me at Mahoney's is on Friday. They had about 350 people signed up and they have 400 spots so that's great. They will see where the openings are and students will receive their placements soon. They need two people certified to drive Vassar vans. He hasn't looked at the weather report yet.

### 7 Discussion of Curricular Agendas.....Academics (30 min)

-There have been various discussions about declaring majors and minors, senior work, etc. To clarify, Dean Chennette's ideas are based around the idea that all students should culminate their time at Vassar with some sort of senior work to prove what all of this Vassar education has given them. He'd like us to talk about the role of the student body in the process of making these changes because currently all curricular change goes through the faculty floor where they all vote on it. Are we making proposals of our own? They will send out all school emails from Academics and Dean Chennette. They made an email people can send feedback to: [vassar.curriculum@gmail.com](mailto:vassar.curriculum@gmail.com). They will also have a series of town halls. The goal is to talk about the value of a Vassar education and what we're really here for. They will then draft a resolution.

-Strong: She feels that students should be making the decision, and faculty don't know best.

-Ferry feels that we have a say because we have such an open curriculum. He feels it's the departments who should grant the credentials, not the entire school. The departments know how to grant you recognition in that specific area.

-TAs: The idea of letting departments make any changes deemed necessary makes sense. He likes the idea of some senior work.

-Activities: He feels it's important to talk to the administration about how they market Academics. He thought he could make his own major and feels that didn't happen as planned. He thinks it's important that everyone is on the same page about any changes that do happen and Admissions needs to convey them.

-Why do we have 34 credits instead of 32? That means that at least 2 semesters you have to take more than 4 credits. Academics responded that it changed from 32 because a lot of students are bringing AP credits, and there are a lot more correlates and majors; on average students take more classes so this requirement creates more diversity.

-Academics: In terms of the role students have in this process, they can change the campus environment by making a space for senior work, making it cool/popular, by reading names of senior projects at graduation, displaying art, promoting theatre performances, etc.

-Cushing asked if the proposed change is to change overload to 4.5 instead of 5. Yes.

-Activities thinks it's important to talk to individuals who aren't doing thesis to find out why and add their voice to the discussion.

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-Dave thinks this is a very important discussion and thanked everyone. He discouraged moving the cart before the horse and suggested taking a holistic look at what academic problems exist (if any) before we start changing them. He doesn't feel that there are many changes that need to be made that the proposed alterations would address.

-2016 loves the openness of the curriculum and that's why he applied to Vassar. He feels strongly about the overload issue and thinks that the decision should be made between his advisor and him what amount of classes he can take.

-TAs asked if this set of proposals is a set of proposals or a singular proposal. Is it all or nothing? We need to know so that people don't get super upset about it; everyone should understand everything before they make opinions. Academics responded that their only cohesive idea is that if there's a goal there needs to be a way of accomplishing the goal. There are several ways we can do this. Dean Chennette has wanted to pursue this idea of senior work since he became dean. He wanted to make space in terms of resources to have faculty advising senior projects and allow more credits that leave room for this work.

-2013 thinks it's important to talk about what resources are used; do people know how to apply for overload, meet with the dean, navigate the registrar, etc.? He also talked about the commitment that will be required of faculty members. There are spaces in the library—could there be more?

-Lathrop asked if the process of applying for overload will be easier. She feels that it would be. Right now you get a form, write why you think you need/deserve overload and then get it reviewed. She wonders if it should have everyone explain course work.

-An at large member brought up the point that we lack information because there isn't sufficient communication with the senior class and there are problems with communication that trump lack of right to choose. Academics plugged the peer advising system which is available on the home page under 'Academics' and you can talk to any senior about your department.

-Operations thinks that we should have a voice in making these changes because it affects why we come here and what we love about this school. There are things she considers problems that her faculty don't find problematic and vice versa. She thinks we should talk to them and show them where they disagree. One of her base concerns is that students physically can't do all the readings from the classes if they're taking 5 and then faculty is forced to assign less reading. We're not in that position of authority.

-2015 thinks that our voice is limited partly because we are here for 4 years and therefore shortsighted. She thinks we should talk to majors committees. What research has Dean Chennette done? If this is going to occur on the Floor of the Faculty where is the shared governance? What is Dean Chennette talking about in terms of a timeline? Academics

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Committee has written a series of questions to go to majors committees. Dean Chennete is not aligned with the faculty. It would be very difficult to change the system of the floor of the faculty. It's very important to be active in other ways. They have information on the distribution requirements of students, what faculty are willing to teach, etc. no formal information in terms of senior work. Outreach hasn't taken place this weekend because they're unsure of proceedings—the timeline is focused on producing something by the end of the year. Dean Chennette expects a lot of student involvement; it's very much an infantile project.

-Student Life thinks that there are two areas with two big issues: Are we making sure there's a problem before we look for a solution? He thinks one healthy way to open the dialogue that's always worth it is reexamining what the application of a liberal arts education is in today's world. He suggests increased avenues for students to talk to faculty; facilitating avenues within their departments to make that happen would be helpful.

-President: we're out of time, but this conversation will continue in many forms. Dean Chennette will come in for a forum.

### 8 Open Discussion

-2013: 236 days until Commencement. Wed at 3 in CC 240 is the debriefing session about serenading in the future. Ticket sales for Halloween will begin when we get back from October break and the theme will be announced.

-President: Chris Roelke will be coming in next Sunday. Let constituents know. We got the invitation to the Seven Sisters Conference. It will be the weekend of October 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>. After this meeting, if you're interested in attending, talk to him.

-Joss asked how other people can get involved in the Alana organizations conversations. President thinks that within committees these conversations will continue.

-Socos talked about a start-up program for recycling on campus for first year students and getting student support in a document about this. They will be working with VSA.

-Cushing: On Saturday 2013, 2014, and 2015 had a training for the new 2016 Council which was fun.

-Activities wanted to say that midterms are coming up and he hopes that everyone does lovely and that the process of learning is more important than the end result!

-2015 is having its first event which is very exciting. Cookies for anyone who wants them! She would like to know what came out of the Exec. meeting with the Alana orgs today. A lot of time was spent getting on the same page/ where everyone was coming from. They didn't get much beyond that, no time, and since it'd taken a while to make this conversation happen, there were a lot of feelings there. Academics said that there were some ideas offered as ways that we can improve, thoughts of doing a teach-in, asking questions

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that are helpful not micro aggressions, thoughts of relating it to the Jewett incident that happened recently, reps from people in this room talk to orgs on a more regular basis, workshops for Council on how to advise anyone else about effective communication regarding sensitive issues, especially around identity based orgs.

-2013 Freshmen Class Council Training was the first thing BHP has done—almost official! Today is the last day to like the Student Gift on Facebook to win v-cash. They’ll be sending out surveys this week about the gift. He is the student coordinator for regional programs, an event called “A Day at Vassar” where community members are invited to come to campus to see what Vassar does and what it is like. Over 360 people attended last year. They’re looking for people to work on Saturday October 13<sup>th</sup>.

-Raymond noted that they have an event on Friday (Flashback Friday) and there’ll be live music and it’ll be fun.

-Town Students made a motion to adjourn. This motion failed with all opposed.

-Davison: Harvest Fest is on Sunday and pray that it won’t rain!.

-Ferry will be collaborating on the Flashback Friday event.

-2015 made a motion to adjourn and it passed with all in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 8:36 p.m.