

Commission on Student Affairs

Thursday, October 13th, 2011

3:30-5:00 p.m.

Brush Mountain Room – Squires Student Center

Present: Shaimaa Abdallah, Matthew Banfield, Sandy Bass, Tom Brown, Sue Buyrn, Tyler Campbell, Naomi Dam, Corbin DiMeglio, Rick Ferraro, Monika Gibson, Jacob Grohs, Erlan Guzman, Atieh Haghdoost, Zack Helmintoller, Mary Ann Lewis, Chris McDonough, Kelly McKew, Michelle McLeese, Margaret McQuain, Shree Narayanan, Farzana Rashid, designee for CISO, Caroline Sapyta, Tom Schlegel, Robert Sebek, Katelin Shugart-Schmidt, Frank Shushok, Guy Sims, Jay Tucker, John Waters, Alex Walker, Emily Wilkinson

Absent: Lauren Beecher, Ceseley Haynes, Monica Hunter, Rawlin Jefferson, Cheyenne Marshall, Nikki Roy, Edward Spencer

Guests: Zach Crizer, Dale Robinson, Kelly Wolff

I. Call to Order

Mr. Bass called the meeting to order at 3:31 p.m.

II. Adoption of Agenda (Last CSA Meeting – September 29th, 2011)

Motion was made to adopt the agenda from the September 29, 2011 CSA meeting. The motion was seconded, carried, and the September 29, 2011 agenda was adopted.

III. Icebreaker – Show and Tell, Vice-Chair Sue Buyrn

Ms. Buyrn introduced Mr. Tyler Campbell and Ms. Shaimaa Abdallah to do “Show and Tell”. Mr. Campbell showed his VT class ring and shared information with the membership about the Ring Tradition, noting that we are coming up on the 102nd ring premiere and 78th Ring Dance.

In addition, Ms. Abdallah passed out an orientation card that includes dates of Graduate Student Assembly events that all students are welcome to attend, highlighting the GSA Research Symposium to be held in March and a card with information about the GSA Graduate Undergraduate Mentoring Program (GUMP).

IV. Guest Speaker(s)/Presenter(s)

- a. Kelly Wolff, General Manager of the Educational Media Company at Virginia Tech, and Zach Crizer, Editor in Chief: *The Collegiate Times*

Mr. Bass introduced Mr. Zach Crizer, Editor-in-Chief of the *Collegiate Times* and Ms. Kelly Wolff, General Manager of EMCVT. Mr. Crizer talked about the *Collegiate Times*, its responsibilities to the Virginia Tech Community, and how it fosters student engagement. The CT produces 10,000 papers a day, has 36,000 viewers on-line each week, and offers Facebook and Twitter components. The CT hopes to drive discussion on campus about important topics (beyond athletics). Mr. Crizer hopes to increase of visibility of the CT on

campus, to partner with student organizations, and to enhance student conversation. However, he also wants the CT to play a role in Blacksburg town issues. He and his staff are interested in working with CSA; and he noted that much of his staff is already involved with the various organizations in person and on-line.

Ms. Wolfe characterized the EMCVT as an umbrella student organization, which embraces the following student media organizations: The Bugle, the Collegiate Times, WUVT, VTTV, the Silhouette Literary Arts. EMCVT promotes leadership and autonomy for student leadership management, and College Media Solutions. It provides mass media services to the campus and off-campus communities, and it offers students educational experiences that can assist directly or indirectly with career and personal development. Governed by a Board of Directors, which meets five times a year, daily operations are run through a Management Advisory Team (Editor and Advisory Staff), but it is the students who are the agenda setters. She noted that a student cannot be removed based on editorial content. She also provided a history of EMCVT noting that it has been legally separate from the University since the mid 90's. In March of 1996 they requested to be a part of the University student life program but the request was denied due to risk management and tax liability considerations. In the spring of 1997, the Division of Student Affairs media task force made the decision that EMCTV should be given \$75,000 a year in assistance, which reflected the amount they had used to fund student media before separation.

Further items covered during the discussion were:

- It was noted that at a public university the school has no control over editorial content for reasons related to liability and first amendment considerations.
- When students control content, the university has no (or less) liability
- Also if student media is to bring forth the student voice, students should enjoy free expression
- There is a Code of Ethics that has been adopted by College Media Advisors
- The structure of EMCVT includes all media organizations and the Board of Directors
- EMCVT is the umbrella group that handles budgets, resource support, advising, education, training
- Ms. Wolff will send a copy of her presentation to the CSA membership.

During the Questions and Answer portion, the following responses were given:

- The *Collegiate Times* wants to work with other groups on campus (student organizations, administrators, etc.).
- It believes it has an important co-curricular role to play at VT.
- A strong student media presence is a traditionally important component of student life.
- Mr. Crizer stated that they want to facilitate dialogue so that all community members (and especially students) can be heard and talk about issues of interest and importance. In the case of on-line commenting, they want to foster expression without retribution. They wish to work with student organizations in a mutually beneficial way; and they do not want to force issues in any one direction.
- They hope to report on matters of interest to students, even if the topic or mode of expression may not be perfectly appropriate. They want students to be able represent their

views.

- Mr. Crizer noted that they assign an impartial person to moderate on-line commentary, that is, that person can bury (but not remove entirely) items that are considered particularly offensive or especially inappropriate. That moderator will not take down an item simply because someone disagrees with it, but rather will act if he or she feels it is especially offensive or highly inappropriate. He reminded that if readers read something extremely offensive, they can inform the CT.
- If something is libelous or defamatory, they delete the comment. But they do not remove comments that are offensive, in part because if they were to moderate submitted material prior to publication, they might become liable for commentary of others generally.
- To the concern that one moderator cannot address all the offensive material placed on line, they explained that they lacked the personnel or budget to do more.
- A statement was made by the membership that setting minimal expectations for civility is not curtailing free speech. Mr. Crizer noted that the CT has standards consistent with civility; but he also observed that it is difficult to control what is said on the on-line commenting board other than to bury them after they are made. That is done according to the paper's standards.
- In regard to a question raised about the issue of alcohol, Mr. Crizer noted that they try to stay away from anything that appears to suggest dangerous practices for their readers.
- The CT's main audience is students, but they also feel it is important to serve the needs of the entire community. The CT has routes that reach out as far as Christiansburg.
- Comments are buried if they are especially offensive or distasteful. If something is libelous or defaming, the comment is removed entirely. The CT follows legal advice in this area.
- Anonymity is a basic fundamental right, though it can be used positively or abused. It was observed by more than one speaker that civility is not inconsistent with anonymity, and that the combination of both can lead to progress.
- Having one person decide for the 36,000 people what is appropriate is not easy, because what is offensive to one person may not be offensive for someone else, and if one assumes broad responsibility in these matters, one can create a liability.
- The observation was made that some national newspapers state that comments that violate community standards will be deleted; and it was asked why the CT does not follow this model, as well as requiring some sort of log-in account (so that privacy if not absolute anonymity, can be maintained). Mr. Crizer noted that by burying comments they are attempting to spare readers from highly offensive material, but that one can nevertheless go and look, so that they are not making a final decision for others. It was pointed out that sometimes persons object to the burial of comments, expressing the opinion that said comments were not truly offensive.
- Ms. McLeese raised a question about doing an assessment of the student body to gauge the deeper feelings of the principal constituent group. Mr. Crizer stated that they obtain an indirect view by seeing how many people read online, pick up papers from newsstands, follow them on social media, etc. But Mr. Crizer added that it would be great to have an objective study and next semester they hope to have focus groups as random samples, possibly by using the Honors Program.
- Ms. Wolff also noted that she would love to have the resources to do a more extensive assessment, but she does not have adequate staff. She also noted that everyone has brought

up very good questions and whether she personally agrees with content decisions students make, it is important that we put the students through situations where they can learn. It is their mission to prepare students for a professional journalism career, even if that is not the career path many will take. There are also students in other majors, who work on the CT staff, whose experience with the CT prepares them for success in other areas.

To investigate this topic more in depth, Mr. Bass recommended that a sub-committee be formed. Motion was made and seconded to form the sub-committee and the motion was carried. Mr. Bass will facilitate the connection between the sub-Committee and the CT to meet outside of the Commission. Mr. Bass asked for nominations for a chair to lead the sub-committee and Ms. Michelle McLeese was nominated. A motion was made to appoint Ms. McLeese as Chair of the sub-committee, it was seconded and carried. Mr. Bass hopes to work with the sub-committee, Mr. Crizer, and Ms. Wolff to have this issue resolved by the end of the semester.

- V. Adjournment** – Motion was made and seconded that the meeting be adjourned. The motion carried and the meeting was adjourned at 5:03 p.m.