

MINUTES

Commission on Student Affairs Meeting

October 29, 2015

3:30 PM – 5:00 PM

Squires Student Center – Brush Mountain Room

Attendees

Jackie Fisher, Jake Tully, Alexis Medina, Mohammed Seyam, Morgan Sykes, Joycelynn Acheampong, Panisa Jiumdumneankij, Lauren Surface, Chelsea Corkins (proxy for Matt Chan), Margaret Appleby, Marina Svyantek (proxy for Tara Reel), Allison Aviles (proxy for Nathalia Ossio), James Orr, Susan Anderson, Luke Carroll, Byron Hughes, Pat Finn, Aliana Harrison, Jimmy McClellan, Samantha Reed, Greg Purdy, Mikey Erb.

Guests

Joe Edens, Tuna Shankar, Daniel Strock, Angela Simmons, Heather Wagner
Sara Alrehah, Janet Webster, Chelsea Cork

Call to Order

At 3:31pm, Chair Jackie Fisher called the meeting to order.

Amendment to Agenda

Mr. Jake Tully made a motion to amend the agenda to include a Deliberation on the Faculty Senate Resolution presented in the previous meeting. Mr. Luke Carroll seconded the motion. The motion passed and the agenda was amended.

Approval of Agenda

Mr. Carroll made a motion to approve the agenda; Mr. Tully seconded, and the agenda was approved.

Religious Holidays

Given a discussion held last meeting, Tom Brown, Dean of Students, gave a brief discussion concerning the history of policies surrounding religious holidays and excused absences at the university.

Dean Brown gave a brief background of excused and unexcused absences. Until 2003, the Division of Student Affairs (DSA) verified absences for religious holidays, which was difficult because they were unfamiliar with procedures. The faculty began to become

resistant to verified absences, as students began giving too late of a notice for religious holidays. The sheer volume of these unexcused absences became difficult for DSA to handle, so the Faculty Handbook and Hokie Handbook were both changed to include that excused absences are left to the discretion of the faculty member. The DSA began to look for a verified source for religious holidays, and found the Inter-Faith calendar, but this calendar is not currently used to verify absences.

Ms. Chelsea Corkins asked if ethnic holidays are included in the inter-faith calendar as the language states and Dean Brown said the language can be changed and specified to make everyone feel included.

Ms. Martina Svyantek asked about the “faculty members are not required to compromise the academic integrity of the course to accommodate religious practices” phrasing in the faculty handbook due to its ambiguity and how it applies that the students are jeopardizing the academic integrity of the class by choosing to observe a religious holiday. Students are put in the place of compromising the integrity. Instead, we could stop the sentence after “integrity of the course.”

Mr. Mohammed Seyam asked if Faculty Members know about this inter-faith calendar. Dean Brown responded that they are supposed to but cannot be guaranteed that they all do, but he countered asking for ideas from CSA about how to remind students, and faculty, about policies regarding attendance and more.

Mr. Mikey Erb asked about how our school being predominately Christian and our holidays are factored into our breaks. Dean Brown stated earlier that 1 or 2 complaints matter but are not enough to change policy. Mr. Erb voiced that he worries that if we do not acknowledge these minority religion issues, it can infringe upon their rights of free speech. Grades can be affected in minority religions for missing class but those same policies would not affect a holiday, such as Christmas, because it is factored into the course schedule.

Dean Brown asked if classes mandate excused vs. unexcused absences. Many students expressed they are given a certain number of unexcused absences and worry that holidays or extra-curriculars that should be “excused” are going as unexcused because students are unwilling or unable to fight it.

Dr. Perillo asked CSA if we should consider the phrasing and current policy because our schedule is molded by the Christian faith and holiday schedule.

Ms. Svyantek offered the suggestion that the inter-faith calendar should be included in the University calendar that already features Christian religious holidays such as Christmas and Easter.

Chair Fisher offered that CSA could create a task force to work on this phrasing further and Mohammed mentioned we should include this issue with InclusiveVT initiatives that are already in place. We will also reach out to intercultural engagement.

Ms. Margaret Appleby, Mr. Seyam, Ms. Svyantek, and Ms. Alexis Medina agreed to work on this issue further.

Dr. Perillo asked how we currently advertise this and Dean Brown said the only thing in place is reading the Hokie Handbook and Faculty Handbook. Dr. Perillo mentioned that she thought that faculty is reminded at the beginning of the year by email, but Dean Brown was unsure and said he would look into it. He asked for other ways to remind faculty and students.

Mr. Seyam asked if there could be reminder emails included in VT news or Faculty newsletters to include the holidays coming up in the next increment of time. Mr. Erb mentioned presenting these issues to Faculty Senate, which meets every other Tuesday at 5:15, the next meeting being on November 10.

SGA Task Force for a Tobacco-Free Campus

Daniel Strock, Vice President of the Student Government Association, came to speak to the Commission about the possibility of a tobacco-free campus.

Mr. Strock shared that we are not a smoke-free or tobacco-free campus, but he is updating us on his preliminary conversations regarding this issues. Mr. Strock shared that in 2014, VT moved to stop the sale of tobacco on campus in the general store, etc. As of Oct. 2015, there are 1,620 smoke-free campuses and 1,130 of those are tobacco-free, and 193 universities ban the usage of e-cigarettes as well. According to SCHEV, 13 of 25 are smoke-free, 4 out of 25 are tobacco-free, and 4 out of 25 have policies like Virginia Tech. There are no other four-year public universities in VA that are smoke and tobacco-free.

In the short term, Mr. Strock wants to create a task force with representatives from FS, GSA, and Staff Senate to get a broad spectrum of opinion regarding the needs of our

campus specifically. He also asked for feedback that could help move this proposal further.

Dr. Perillo asked CSA members what they believe their constituencies would think.

Mr. Erb replied that he, personally, smokes and is interested to compare tobacco usage to alcohol usage on campus. Danny believed compared to alcohol, the tobacco issue is very different and it is difficult to address the two in the same way.

Mr. Erb also asked if Danny has talked to the agricultural college because farms students work on can be considered campus.

Mr. Strock shared that this policy could transition into a cultural change, not necessarily an enforceable offence.

Mr. Jimmy McClellan mentioned the consequences on housekeeping or other staff members who smoke and might resist based upon their personal preferences and the cultural impact by the Appalachia region that we are surrounded by.

Ms. Lauren Surface asked if there are resources for students to quit smoking and suggested that VT make sure those programs are in place before banning tobacco use.

Mr. Erb asked if we are here to change the culture or embrace the culture. He worried that throwing out the term cultural change could have slippery implications if used as a precedent. He understands that smoking is a medical and cultural issue but he worries that in an attempt to make people healthier/better, we may be changing how to live our lives. Mr. Strock recognizes these concerns and will take that into consideration.

Ms. Samantha Reed explained that the Corp of Cadets has a strong tie with smoke-free tobacco (chewing tobacco) and that SGA should study that usage and take both into consideration when making this policy.

Mr. Jake Tully went back to the issue of culture, saying that some cultures are toxic. While smoking is not something to be celebrated, Mr. Erb worries about who sets these standards/stigmas. Dr. Perillo reminded CSA of the difference between “who you are” and “what you do”.

Mr. Greg Purdy encouraged SGA or the task force to research intensely other universities and how they have succeeded in the past, including paying close attention to vaping and e-cigarette usage.

Amendments to Agenda

Chair Fisher explained that, when creating the agenda, she made a mistake and forgot to change the Constitution reading from “First” to “Second.”

Mr. Tully motioned to amend the agenda stating that both readings under Old Business should say “second reading” instead of “first reading,” Ms. Susan Anderson seconded it, and the motion passed.

Chair Fisher explained that Tavianna Williams was going to be unable to attend the meeting today, meaning that she would be unable to read the Constitution Changes for the National Pan-Hellenic Council.

Mr. Tully motioned to table the National Pan-Hellenic Council Constitution Changes until the next meeting. Ms. Medina seconded the motion, and the motion passed.

Old Business

A. National Pan-Hellenic Council Constitution Changes: Second Reading

The National Pan-Hellenic Council Constitution Changes were tabled until the next meeting.

B. Asian American Student Union Constitution Changes: Second Reading

Ms. Panisa Jiumdumneakij, President of the Asian American Student Union, presented the Constitution changes for the AASU. These changes were made to clarify some language and to adequately convey the goals and standards of the organization.

Ms. Jimudumneakij showed track changes of language and grammatical errors found during first reading.

Mr. Tully motioned to approve the constitutional changes. The motion was seconded by Ms. Medina.

The vote was in favor of approval with one abstention by LASO.

New Business

A. Student Budget Board Appeal

The Commission on Student Affairs received an appeal from the Student Budget Board, a Committee of the Commission, concerning a denied funding request from the Big Event. Chair Fisher explained that the process in which an appeal is dealt with requires an Appeals Committee to be formed from members of the Commission. This committee will meet in the upcoming weeks to go over the appeal letter as well as the Student Budget Board policies in order to determine if the Big Event has grounds for an appeal. If the appeals committee determines that there are grounds for appeal, then the appeal will then come to the Commission, where a representative from the Student Budget Board and a representative from the appellate organization will present their respective cases. The Commission will then decide if the appeal actually goes through or not.

This committee will have their decision made by Thursday, November 5, exactly one week from today. If the committee decides that the appellate organization has grounds for appeal by this date, then the involved parties will have one week to prepare their cases and will then present at the Thursday, November 12 meeting of the Commission.

Mr. Matt Chan, Mr. Jake Tully, and Ms. Susan Anderson volunteered to be on the appeals Committee.

Ms. Anderson explained that, though the line item in the appeal states that the money is meant for postage, the money does not pay specifically for postage, but rather for printing and for the labor involved in stuffing envelopes.

Discussion on Faculty Senate Resolution regarding Shared Governance

Chair Fisher explained a brief background on the Resolution and its affects. The first reading is scheduled for Monday Nov. 2nd at University Council.

Mr. Tully opened discussion explaining that SGA has multiple issues with the Faculty Senate Resolution. He explained that the resolution seemed to stem from the idea that membership in Faculty Senate needed to be incentivized, with the incentive in this case being more "power." Mr. Tully also explained that, while increased faculty involvement is encouraged, SGA does not believe that the resolution will encourage involvement any better than the current structures already in place. Lastly, Mr. Tully explained that the

resolution does not seem to accomplish the intended result of combatting apathy, but rather simply slows down the governance process.

Mr. Purdy explained that GSA is split on this issue as noted by a straw poll.

Ms. Tuna Shankar, President of SGA, explained that SGA had a similar straw poll and was unanimously opposed to the resolution with one abstained vote.

Dr. Orr explained that CUSP voted to oppose the resolution.

Ms. Morgan Sykes explained that students do not feel that this resolution is ready to go through University Council.

Ms. Corkins addressed that the proposed resolution does not seem to solve the problems that it is intended to and although no formal vote, there seemed to be opposition.

Mr. Erb asked why students and staff would not have similar appendix additions regarding their opinions, and Mr. Tully explained that Faculty Senate was focused on faculty issues and the resolution belonged to the faculty.

Ms. Susan Anderson explained that Staff Senate is thinking about a similar document interested in different commissions. These resolutions were initially working together but the administration recommended splitting up the two.

Ms. Appleby explained a confusion as to why this “quick fix” is being pushed through governance, as there seems to be a much bigger issue than this resolution can solve.

Mr. Purdy explained that he is not against the extra faculty involvement but sees this as just a band-aid for the governance structure at Virginia Tech (which has not recently been reviewed) and a band-aid for faculty senate itself.

Ms. Anderson explained that this resolution is not trying to slow down the process but be proactive and allow faculty to fix issues before they get to university council.

After deliberation, Chair Fisher asked for an informal vote on the resolution by show of placards.

Mr. Purdy asked if we are speaking on behalf of our delegation or our personal opinion. Mr. Seyam mentioned that this is not a formal vote. Mr. Tully said the point of a straw poll is to poll the opinion of members of CSA, not the organizations.

Ms. Sevyantek asked what the options were for the poll. Chair Fisher clarified that there would be two options. The first being to approve the resolution that was presented to CSA on October 15, 2015 as it currently stands with no changes, and the second being to oppose the resolution as it currently stands with no changes.

The straw poll indicated that there was 1 in favor of the resolution, 10 oppose, and 8 abstentions.

Commission, Committee, and Sub-Committee Updates

The committee on the CSA Operation Manual created a shared GoogleDoc with information concerning the Operation Manual. Chair Fisher explained that in upcoming weeks, the committee will be meeting with possible options as to what needs to go into the manual for the Commission to choose from.

Announcements

Ms. Appleby said that the Dance of Nations will be held on November 11 in the GLC auditorium.

Mr. Erb presented the HokePride Drag Show on November 13 at 7:00 PM.

Ms. Joycelynn Acheampong told CSA that on Monday, November 1, Tim Wise will be presenting "Dear White America" at 7pm at Moss Arts, and that there would be a follow-up forum in the GLC the following day.

Ms. Shankar told CSA that SGA is hosting follow-up for the "My Culture is Not a Costume" event on November 4 at 7:00 PM in Squires 341. Open dialogue will be welcome and there will be moderators that will facilitate discussion if necessary.

Mr. Seyam told CSA that next Sunday and Monday, Nov. 8th and 9th, BOV meeting at Inn and Torgeson. All are welcome to attend open sessions.

Ms. Susan Anderson explained that Womanspace needed insurance for an event, but found the speaker also needed insurance. Never having needed this before, the Brown Insurance company was unsure of what to do and the speaker had to cancel due to a

lack of insurance. Members of the gallery explained that they would speak with Event Planning and Risk Management to improve the situation.

Adjournment

Mr. Tully made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Ms. Medina, and passed. The meeting adjourned at 5:08 PM.