SGA Minutes  
September 14, 2014

I. Attendance

All members present.

II. Acceptance of Minutes

Senator Jahan: Motion to accept minutes.  
Senator Gerstenschlager: Seconded.  
All aye.  
Minutes accepted.

III. Announcements

President Custer: I hope everyone had a good first week and I want to say welcome to the Senators who could not make the first Senate meeting. Just so you know, that will not count as an absence. So, those of you who could not make the retreat, could go around and say your name, class year, major, and what you hope to accomplish through the SGA this semester?

Senator Sanders, Senator Judy, Senator Chang, Senator de Toledo, and Co-Chair Bogin introduce themselves.

President Custer: The next thing on the agenda is the First Year elections.

Chief of Staff Zhang: The elections for the two First Year Senators are this Friday and Nick has been working on the logistics for that. About seven or eight First Years showed up to the informational meeting. Their petitions will be handed in tomorrow. We have to ratify their petitions, but we won’t be able to do that until next week. We will ratify them before we officially seat the new Senators.

Senator Toy: Isn’t the point of us ratifying them to make sure that they got all the requirements that they needed to run?

Chief of Staff Zhang: Yes, but we wanted to seat the senators sooner so they can be a part of more of our discussions, so that’s why we moved elections up to Friday. The Elections Council will be making sure they got all of their signatures and that the petitions are valid.

President Custer: You will have to ratify their petitions before we seat them, so you will have an opportunity to make sure that they got all of the signatures they needed. In the future, this hopefully won’t happen, but it is important to get the First Years here as quickly as possible. And we haven’t had issues with signatures in the past. The last announcement is to encourage applications to the committees. We are still accepting applications to a couple of the committees, so reach out to friends and people you think would be good SGA members. Talk especially about the lesser-known Committees.
Senator Chang: I got an email saying that the deadline had passed.

Senator Custer: There are only a few that were already due.

Senator Zhang: Yes, the only ones that already had applications due were Community Council, Student Liaison to the SGA on Endowment Affairs, and Elections Council and those were due last Friday.

Senator Chang: I think that you should send out another email.

Senator Vaughan: The Board of Trustees meeting is coming up soon so I think we need to look at the applications for that position as soon as we can.

President Custer: Virginia Wiltshire-Gordon from the SRI is going to give us a presentation at the end of the meeting today so we can get an idea of exactly what this position does so those on the Selection Committee can know what they are looking for.

IV. Committee Reports

a. Community Council

Co-Chair Bogin: I just want to say “hi” and that I’m really excited about Community Council this year and working with you guys. Nick and I are in the process of selecting the students to serve on Community Council. I’m hoping to look specifically at the Honor Code, so if anyone here has anything to add to that discussion, I would love to hear your ideas or have you write a bill. Senate is a great place to get things going, but if you think that Community Council is a better forum for your idea, we would love to take you up on that.

Senator Chang: What is the difference between something that we would bring to Senate versus something we would bring to Community Council?

Co-Chair Bogin: Well, Community Council has both faculty and students serve on it and we make suggestions to the President. However, we don’t have a budget like the SGA does. We can recommend that the administration fund something, but if you’re looking for funding, that will generally come from the SGA. We make more policy recommendations. Also, the SGA can take on things that are academic—Community Council is strictly non-academic. MiddCourses was a great example of something to bring to the SGA. It was a student-led initiative and also had to do with academics.

President Custer: Some of the things that Co-Chair Carroll Brown talked about in Community Council last year were the ideas of having security cameras around campus and having a partially dry campus. Community Council generally talks about things like Residential Life and Social Houses, which involve more than just students.

V. Old Business
a. Constituency Outreach and Student Engagement Act (F2014-SB1)

President Custer: The first bill is the Constituency Outreach and Student Engagement Act. Hopefully you all had a chance to read it beforehand. What it does is mandates office hours for class year Senators, the Co-Chair of Community Council, and the President. Commons Senators are already required to go to Commons Council meetings and there is nothing similar for the other Senators. Since we had very few contested elections, I am concerned about our transparency. This is a concrete way for people to see who we are and get to know us. Most students already know the President and CCOCC or at least know our names, but students don’t necessarily know who their Senators are. In addition, this bill takes away some of the responsibilities from the Press Secretary. The Press Secretary will now just interact with the SGA and with The Campus. The new position that I’m creating is the Director of Student Engagement—thank you to Senator Vaughan for the title—and they will handle all of the publicity work that the SGA wants to be doing. The Director of Student Engagement will chair the Publicity Committee and they will handle any campaign that the SGA wants to do this semester. I think it’s important to split this job up because both parts require different skills and it is a lot for one person to do.

Senator Jahan: What are the Press Secretary’s duties?

President Custer: Currently, the Press Secretary chairs the Publicity Committee, takes notes at all of the Senate and Cabinet meetings, deals with The Campus, and makes sure that that all of the files behind the scenes are taken care of. The Press Secretary was also in charge of the Facebook, Twitter, website, and publicity. There is a lot of time involved in doing both different parts of the job.

Senator Chang: What would you say are the biggest cons to the changes you are making?

President Custer: The argument could be that it creates another unnecessary bureaucratic position that we don’t need. This is where I would like input from the Senators. I don’t want to create another student position that doesn’t end up doing anything, but I think that publicity and campaigns are a big part of what I want to do this year, so this person is going to have an important position and they will be doing a lot.

Senator Vaughan: Why don’t we just create an SGA Committee for Student Engagement instead of a new position? That way we don’t have to add another person. We have enough human power here to do this, especially for this particular initiative. I also think it could help increase the awareness of Senators on this campus.

President Custer: We will have the Publicity Committee, which is basically what you are talking about. We just need someone to chair the Publicity Committee so that someone is actually responsible to the President. It’s important to have a committee, but having someone in charge of it is also important and that’s what this position will accomplish.
Senator Fisher: My biggest concern is the red tape thing. What alarms me is that the Press Secretary is still the liaison to The Campus. Seeing as the student idea of the SGA is already a bit confused and we are in the process of rebranding, we need to make sure that our message is cohesive and clean. This bill makes it so that we have two separate people trying to send a unified cohesive message about the SGA.

Senator Toy: I agree with what Senator Fisher is saying. The Press Secretary deals with the inner workings and that’s great, but I think if the Director of Student Engagement is going to be sharing our message with the student body, they should have to come to some of our meetings. We need to know what they are doing. They can’t just do one Facebook post and call it quits. I think we should be keeping track of what they are doing.

Senator Chang: Did you have someone in mind for the position?

President Custer: Yes I do. Robin Loewald. She was a Co-Chair on Ross Commons Council and all of their events were really well attended last year. However, I think that the person I am choosing should be separate from what we think about this position in the abstract.

Speaker Brady: Last year, I worked a lot on publicizing elections. I had the idea to form a committee within the SGA, but it was a very singular effort. We like to think that we have the time to handle this ourselves, but we are very busy people. I think we should have a solid position and someone who is interested in publicity instead of having a committee of Senators who are already time-stripped.

Senator Jahan: I think it’s great that the Press Secretary is at all of our meetings because that way she has a good idea of what is going on. This new position also needs to be able to see us and see what we’re doing instead of just being told about it. I don’t think that the skill sets of the Press Secretary and the Director of Student Engagement are that different.

Senator de Toledo: It should be a position that attends every meeting and has an active role in the SGA.

Senator Vaughan: Have you thought about having another element of the student body involved in this, like clubs? Maybe we could incorporate a liaison to student organizations on the Publicity Committee. I think that the SGA definitely could have a better relationship with student organizations. I don’t know if it would need to be formalized or if it would be ad hoc, but they could meet with different groups of clubs and let them know about ways that they could work with the SGA.

Senator de Toledo: Would you see that as a different role than the roles that the Constitution Committee and Finance Committee already play? I don’t want to create more unnecessary bureaucracy.

Senator Vaughan: My understanding is that the Finance Committee is where we go for money, and I don’t really know much about the Constitution Committee, but I think this would be more issue based—like how they could use the SGA to forward the mission of their club. We wouldn’t
necessarily have to endorse their ideas, but we could help them with publicity. It would be about collaboration and making sure they know what avenues the SGA has that student organizations could take advantage of.

Senator Toy: The Student Activities office is the place to go to for student organizations. I get what you are saying, but I just don’t think that it is necessary. Any club that wants to do something on this campus goes to the Finance Committee or to Student Activities. I don’t think we need to add more resources that they won’t use. This cabinet position will already do that and they can answer questions about publicity, but I don’t think it needs to be that explicit.

Senator Gerstenschlager: Responding to Senator Vaughan, I don’t think that is necessary. I think that we should be the way that students get their questions answered, especially since we’ll be having office hours. Senator Jahan and I held office hours, I’ve received a lot of emails from students, and I’ve just had people come up to me in person and tell me their ideas. We can answer questions that way.

Speaker Brady: I just want to familiarize all of you with the way we can adjust bills. You have the option to propose either Friendly Amendments or Formal Amendments and I will yield to Chief of Staff Zhang so he can explain more about those.

Chief of Staff Zhang: These bills can be amended on the Senate floor. What happens first is that you propose your amendment to the author. If the author likes it, it can be added to the bill as a Friendly Amendment. If it is more controversial, you can propose a Formal Amendment to the Senate floor, someone can motion to close discussion, and then we can vote on the amendment, despite what the author thinks.

Speaker Brady: Also, just a note, this bill requires office hours so don’t forget about that.

Speaker Brady: Motion to limit discussion on F2014-SB1 to five minutes.

9-6-0
Motion passes.

Chief of Staff Zhang: One more thing about logistics. This is a Bylaw Amendment, so we cannot vote on it tonight. The soonest we could vote on this is next week.

Senator Fisher: We have an opportunity now do what President Custer wants in clearing up red tape. I think we are in dangerous waters with adding more responsibilities and positions. The whole reason we have this position in the first place is so that the Press Secretary isn’t overloaded and I don’t want us to overload the new position by making them attend a bunch of meetings and meet with clubs. Also, Senator Toy had a great point about Student Activities being a resource to student organizations. I think we should keep this as simple as we can. I suggest that we change the title of Press Secretary to Senatorial Secretary and make the liaison to The Campus a responsibility of the Director of Student Engagement.

President Custer does not approve this Friendly Amendment.
Speaker Brady: Would you like to make a Formal Amendment, Senator Fisher?

Senator Fisher: Yes. Two changes: the first is to change the title of Press Secretary to Senatorial Secretary and the second is to put the clause about being the liaison to The Campus under the responsibilities of the Director of Student Engagement.

Vote on Fisher Amendment to F2014-SB1
Ayes: Senator Gerstenschlager, Senator Fisher
Nays: President Custer, Senator Gogineni, Senator Sanders, Senator Toy, Senator Judy, Senator Vaughan, Senator Hussein, Senator Chang, Senator de Toledo, Co-Chair Bogin, Speaker Brady
Abstain: Senator Jahan, Senator Medina
2-11-2
Amendment defeated.

President Custer: As for the title change, I think there is something important about tradition and doing things as the SGA has done them in the past. I also think that these are very separate roles. The Director of Student Engagement handles publicity. If students want to get something done, they should go to you, not the Director of Student Engagement. One of the issues we have is how to split the responsibilities so that each person gets a good amount of work. We need to have one single message to convey to the student body and it really doesn’t matter that we have two roles communicating that message because the message is coming from me as the President, so it is my responsibility to see that we have one cohesive message. Adding the liaison to The Campus to the Director of Student Engagement would be a lot of work and it’s not like this job is the only thing that this person is going to be doing on this campus.

Speaker Brady: Time is now out for discussing this. We can vote to add more time if there is a motion to do so.

Senator Toy: Motion to extend discussion on F2014-SB1 for ten minutes.
President Custer: Seconded.
10-3-2
Motion passes.

Co-Chair Bogin: I want to talk about the office hours component. I remember President Liddell told me that she had office hours and nobody ever came to them and it was a waste of her time. I think that office hours will be a burden and I don’t think that we should have legislation forcing them. Also, are you allowed to specifically mention Co-Chair of Community Council in this bill and mandate that I have office hours?

President Custer: Yes, we are allowed to do that. The Commons Senators already do this and since I served as a Commons Senator and sometimes the Commons Council meetings went for more than an hour, I really don’t have sympathy about the time commitment. Even if people don’t show up, it does make us more present and I think that is enough. Hopefully students will
come and engage with us, but either way, it has a lot of upsides and very few downsides. It is not a big commitment given what the SGA should be doing.

Senator Toy: I want to go back to the discussion on the Press Secretary. What does it mean that the Press Secretary is the liaison to The Campus? Is it just sending the minutes to them or is it more than that?

President Custer: That’s mostly what it is but we are hoping to increase our interaction with them this year. It is traditionally not a lot of work. I would like to see a reporter at our meetings. This isn’t the main job of the Press Secretary, but since the Press Secretary already has to interact with them to send the minutes, it makes sense for her to be the liaison to The Campus.

Senator Toy: I think that the Director of Student Engagement should have to come to Senate meetings just like how the Treasurer comes to all of our meetings. I would like to propose that as a Friendly Amendment.

President Custer: Motion to conduct a straw poll on if the Director of Student Engagement should have to come to all Senate meetings.
Senator Jahan: Seconded
9-3-2

President Custer does not approve this Friendly Amendment.

President Custer: I don’t know how important it will be for them to come to these meetings. They will also be running all of the Facebook and social media as well as chairing Publicity Committee, so I don’t want to overload them. What they will be doing is running campaigns when there is something that the SGA wants to spread awareness about. They will do what the Senate needs them to do. I don’t want them to have to come to every meeting, but I would be okay with having language that says we could summon them to a meeting if necessary.

Speaker Brady: Senator Toy, you can respond and make a Formal Amendment if you want.

Senator Toy: I see this position like the Treasurer—it is a big position. They don’t necessarily need to sit for the whole meeting but at some point they need to be here so that if there is something we want to tell them, we can do it then. I’m afraid that the message will get lost if the President forgets to tell them to do something. Maybe they could just attend for the last ten minutes?

Senator Jahan: Personally, I would not vote for this the way it is now. I like the office hours part but not the Director of Student Engagement part. Can we split it?

Chief of Staff Zhang: Splitting the question is a useful tool for you Senators to know about and this is a great example. It basically means that if you like one part of a bill and not the other parts, we can make an amendment to split the bill into multiple sections and we can vote on multiple bills. It seems fancy, but that’s really all it is.
Senator Jahan: Senator Gerstenschlager and I had office hours this week. It was a great way for us to get to know each other better and I think it is important for us to be out there. Granted, nobody came to the office hours. We have, however, gotten a lot of emails and had people come up and talk to us at other times. It was only an hour out of our week and we just had lunch—it was great.

Speaker Brady: We are currently out of time to discuss this issue and we still have two more bills to talk about tonight, so is there a motion to table this until next week?

    President Custer: Motion to close discussion and table F2014-SB1.
    Senator Jahan: Seconded
    All aye.

b. Improving Cabinet Efficiency (ICE) Act (F2014-SB2)

President Custer: So this bill proposes another change to the Cabinet, but this one hopefully shouldn’t be too controversial. It just combines the positions of Director of Alumni Relations and Director of External Affairs. The Director of Alumni Relations doesn’t really do all that much, so we’re giving those responsibilities to the Director of External Affairs.

    Senator Toy: Motion to close discussion and table F2014-SB2.
    Senator Gerstenschlager: Seconded.
    All aye.

c. Competitive Elections Clarification Act (F2014-SB3)

President Custer: This was a bill that Senator LaBarba proposed last year, which says that if we only get one or two people running in any race (race is uncontested), an email goes to the constituency saying that this is uncontested. I don’t think that anyone here can really be against that. The only change that this makes is making the language more consistent with our Bylaws. It had some colloquial language before.

Senator Fisher: Who writes that email, the Director of Membership?

President Custer: Yes.

Senator Vaughan: It seems beyond our scope to encourage people to run. I don’t think we should be doing that. We should just tell them that it is contested. It isn’t in the powers of the government to encourage people to run—just to run the elections.

Senator de Toledo: I disagree, because it really increases our credibility to have contested elections. There were only two this time, and while it is great that we are all here, our credibility isn’t as high as when we aren’t really elected.

President Custer: The spirit of the bill is what you are saying Senator Vaughan—just to tell people about the election and that it is uncontested. But I will side with Senator de Toledo on this
because we need our elections to be contested. We shouldn’t recommend certain people to run, but we should be doing anything we can do in a non-partisan way.

Senator Vaughan: I just don’t like the idea that the SGA could say that we need more people to run. We should just say that the election is still open and you can still run. If we say that we need more people to run, that harms our legitimacy.

Senator Fisher: I respectfully disagree. It isn’t a race if only one person is running and a race is vital to any thriving democracy and any place that believes representation matters. It’s about giving people choices. It isn’t wrong to encourage more people to run in elections without a lot of people running.

Senator Vaughan: I want to consider the bounds of what we can do as the government, whether we can be actively encouraging people to run in these elections instead of just saying what the state of things are. Either way, I don’t really think this will change the bill.

Senator Jahan: Is your concern that by saying that we don’t have enough people running that we are downgrading the people who are running? I do think that elections should be competitive. The issue is just in the writing of the email.

President Custer: I agree with Senator Jahan. I understand the concern about the email, Senator Vaughan, because we don’t want to be saying that the people who are running aren’t good enough. But if the race is uncontested, the position of the SGA should be that it shouldn’t be uncontested. The fact that someone doesn’t have to do anything to get a position is an issue. I do think we should be careful in the wording of the email.

Senator Toy: Motion to close discussion and table F2014-SB3.
Senator Chang: Seconded.
All aye.

VI. New Business

a. Presentation by Virginia Wiltshire-Gordon from the SRI about the SLSEA

President Custer: Virginia Wiltshire-Gordon from the SRI is here to talk to us now about the Student Liaison to the SGA on Endowment Affairs position and what it entails.

Virginia Wiltshire-Gordon: There are two students who sit on the Investment Committee. I am one of them and I report back to the SRI and the other position will report back to the SGA. There is a Board of Trustees meeting this weekend so the position needs to be filled as soon as possible. The Student Liaison to the SGA on Endowment Affairs (SLSEA) is basically the same position that I hold as a part of the SRI, but they will report to you instead of to the SRI. We worked really hard for two years to get this position in place so we are really excited that it exists. Josh Rombach held it last year. What it entails is just a lot of commitment. We get to read everything that the Investment Committee reads. Our job is to read it, understand it, and have some things to say about it. They need to be prepared for the meetings and be up to date on what
is going on currently with responsible investing. They also need to be up to date on what student opinion is. The SIC and SRI generally get a feel for what students think about investment and divestment and the SLSEA should report back to the SGA about what the opinion of the student body is on these issues. This is a big time commitment and it needs to be taken seriously, because this student and I will be the only students who have access to the information. Most of it is confidential, so it is up to us to make sure that Middlebury’s values are being upheld. There aren’t very many meetings: one in September, one in January, and one in May. This can make it hard for the Investment Committee to get to know someone. Part of the reason that I’m holding this position again this year because the Investment Committee now knows me and they know my face. That being said, a younger candidate could be in the best interest of the SGA. It is also important that this person is willing to speak up. I am one of three women in the meetings…it is a room filled mostly with white males. It can be an intimidating space and we need someone who can speak up and be assertive. Another important part of the position, at least for now, is to actually make sure that the position stays in place. It is currently a pretty ad hoc position. If the Chairman were to decide he doesn’t want students to sit on the committee anymore, then the students are gone. That’s an extra responsibility for now, which hopefully can be fixed and won’t be an issue in the future. Also, the application for this should have gone out in the spring, so hopefully that can be remedied in the future as well.

Senator Chang: Is this person a Senator? How much knowledge of finance should this person have?

Virginia Wiltshire-Gordon: They need to be ready to learn. No background is necessary, although it would be nice. Any student can fill this position, so it could be a Senator.

Senator Toy: Do we have any pull with the Board of Trustees? Can we write a bill saying that we always want two students to be on the Investment Committee?

Virginia Wiltshire-Gordon: That already exists.

President Custer: The Board of Trustees is basically above everyone else. They take us seriously, but that doesn’t mean that if we pass a bill that they will do what we want them to do. We have authority over the student body but in terms of everybody else, we really need administrators to work with us. The role is not to push any agenda, just to report back to the SGA, but obviously they still can and should engage in the conversation.

Senator Chang: Should we be looking for someone who is pushing divestment?

Virginia Wiltshire-Gordon: That’s up to the SGA.

President Custer: Thanks, Virginia!

Chief of Staff Zhang: We need another person to be on the SLSEA Committee. We already have Senator Vaughan and Senator Toy on the committee.

Senator Judy and Senator Chang both volunteer.
Chief of Staff Zhang: How about each of you give a thirty second speech about why you would want to serve on this committee?

Senator Judy: I’m very interested in finance and I spend around an hour everyday looking at this sort of thing and talking to my friends and people who have strong opinions on the endowment. I think that this is a really important job and that’s why I would like to be on this committee.

Senator Chang: I was a member of the SRI and I was at the Divestment Panel. I would like to see what the Senate’s opinion about divestment is and then ask the candidates about their opinion and see how those match.

President Custer: If you could both answer just one more question briefly: When you are looking at applications, what do you see as the main role as this person?

Senator Judy: I’m expecting them to compliment the SRI rep. The SRI representative is more of a speaker and the SGA representative is more of a listener.

Senator Chang: I also agree that they should be more of a listener, but I know that everyone will being their own lens to the position and whatever they say will have an affect on the trustees.

Vote on Third Senator for SLSEA Committee
Senator Judy: 8
Senator Chang: 5
Abstaining: 2
Senator Judy elected to the SLSEA Committee.

Chief of Staff Zhang: Congratulations, Senator Judy. Nick will be in touch with all of you about this Committee. The next order of business is the Honor Codes. You may have seen that they are now up in the library. Unfortunately, the cases are small, so the Class of 2018’s signatures all fit, but we need to find space for the other three classes. The plan is to scan all of the signatures, reformat them, and print them using the plotters so that they fit onto one sheet. Currently there are a lot of headers and empty space and if we do it this way, it will look more uniform instead of like it was just pieced together. If anyone is proficient in Illustrator, please let me know.

Senator Toy: Can you ask a Media Desk tutor about using Illustrator?

Chief of Staff Zhang: Yes, I am actually going to the library after this to learn. They will teach me, but unfortunately they don’t work on student projects during the school year.

Senator Jahan: I do think there is some power in seeing your personal signature. Hopefully in the future we can have it formatted so that everyone’s actual signature can be on display.

President Custer: I completely agree.

b. We The Middkids Cleanup
Speaker Brady: We have one more thing on the agenda and that’s the We The Middkids Cleanup. Is there a motion to table that until next week?

    President Custer: Motion to table We The Middkids Cleanup.
    Senator Jahan: Seconded
    All aye.

VII. Adjournment

    Senator Toy: Motion to adjourn.
    Senator Jahan: Seconded
    All aye.
    Meeting adjourned.