SGA Minutes
September 28, 2014

I. Attendance

All members present.

II. Acceptance of Minutes

Co-Chair Bogin: Motion to accept minutes.
Senator Gerstenschlager: Seconded.
All aye.
Minutes accepted.

III. Announcements

President Custer: I hope you all had a good week. The first announcement is to introduce Robin Loewald. Last week we created the Director of Publicity position and you confirmed her as my nominee.

Robin Loewald: Thank you all for approving my nomination to the cabinet. I’m the Director of Publicity and essentially I am trying to get as many students as possible to know about what the SGA is doing. My first project is to publicize MiddCourses and make sure that the student body knows about it and uses it before registering for spring classes.

President Custer: The Publicity Committee is in the process of being formed. Applications are out so if you know anyone artistic, you should encourage them to apply for this committee. Thanks, Robin! The next announcement is that we have a reporter from The Campus here, Claire, who will be coming to our weekly meetings. Everything you say is on the record and you could be quoted in The Campus.

IV. Committee Reports

a. SGA Liaison to the SGA on Endowment Affairs – Ian Rhee

Ian Rhee: I am the SGA Liaison to the SGA on Endowment Affairs (SLSEA) and I am here to express your concerns and opinions to the Board of Trustees and I look forward to hearing your input on this. I sit on the Investment Committee and see where the funds are allocated and help build our endowment for future use. If you have input and concerns about things like divestment, I am more than willing to hear you guys out and answer any questions. I’m taking over for Josh Rombach and I was wondering what the protocol was when he came to speak to you guys.

President Custer: I was here last year when Josh would come to talk to us. He actually only came to one meeting. He had typed up a list of all the things that they talked about that he was allowed to make public. There are some things that only you will get to see. He basically just gave us an update of what they are discussing and answered questions from the Senate.
Ian Rhee: Last week the Board of Trustees had a meeting on campus but unfortunately Virginia and I were not allowed to attend because it wasn’t specifically about the endowment. I will be going to New York on October 15 for a meeting though.

Senator Vaughan: Do you plan on getting formal student input? Is there a mechanism in place for you to get that information? I think that getting information from students would be beneficial since you are our representative.

Ian Rhee: There is not a mechanism in place but I do want to get suggestions from you guys, and if you want me to poll the campus, that is something that I can look into doing. I do work with the SRI on how to build dialogue between them and the Board of Trustees and other organizations on campus. I will definitely talk to Taylor and Danny about how to better gauge opinion of the student body. My email is irhee@middlebury.edu so feel free to contact me with suggestions or questions.

Speaker Brady: He is the liaison to the SGA, so we should talking to our constituencies to hear what they want and what they think about the endowment and we should then be the ones to pass that message along to the SLSEA.

b. Finance Committee Bi-Weekly Report – Treasurer Ilana Gratch

Treasurer Gratch: So far the Finance Committee has met with ten student organizations: Sunday Night Group, Gap Year Students, Eat Real, Cycling Club, Men’s Water Polo, Poor Form Poetry, Translingual, Brooker, YAM, and Mischords. All of these were budget requests except for Sunday Night Group and Eat Real who came in with new money requests. Eat Real got $0 because we redirected them to the MCAB Speakers Committee. If anybody has any questions about the decisions that we made, I can answer them.

Speaker Brady: I noticed a couple of people came in asking for the wrong things from the Finance Committee when they should have been asking elsewhere? Is there a recommendation that you would make to us about how to make that happen less often?

Treasurer Gratch: Yeah, that happens a lot. We are always very explicit and we redirect them to the right place. It’s all over our website, but if you have any ideas about how we could better communicate that to student orgs, we would appreciate suggestions.

Chief of Staff Zhang: Treasurer Gratch, can you explain why you come in and give these reports to the Senate?

Treasurer Gratch: The Senate has to approve all of the budgeting decisions that the Finance Committee makes and I think it is important that you all stay informed of the decisions we are making as we are making them. The Finance Committee is a Committee of the SGA and we started this bi-weekly report last year so that there can be more transparency. Last year, the Senators would thoroughly read our justifications and come to meetings with a lot of questions and I think it would be great if you checked our work.
Co-Chair Bogin: Of all of those, Brooker is the only one that is not a club. Why do we fund Brooker? Don’t they get money from their own realm?

Treasurer Gratch: Social houses get some money from the school, but we fund their programming.

Speaker Brady: Is it normal that you cut a new request in half? Is it general procedure that you’ll tell them to work with what they have for a semester?

Treasurer Gratch: Yes, especially if a budget is already pretty large. We will give them enough for a semester and see how it works. People have a lot of plans but we’ve had a lot of money roll back to us so we want to make sure that these new plans are successful. Also, these are the actual emails that student organizations receive from the Finance Committee.

Doug Adams: Just an administrative note—there are two residential organizations: Weybridge and Brooker. They have a parallel structure where they receive money as an organization and as a special interest house. The rest of the houses on campus do not have that parallel structure.

President Custer: We have the Finance Committee Bi-Weekly Report so that we can keep up to date on what they are doing. It is really important that we read this report because although the Finance Committee does an excellent job at allocating the Student Activities Fee, we need to make sure that the SGA is allocating things fairly and with as much impact as possible. Asking good questions and reading the report thoroughly is part of your responsibility as Senators.

Senator Vaughan: Is there a check on this? What can we do if the Finance Committee is not allocating the SAF properly?

President Custer: Yes. Firstly, the Senate has to vote on the budget presented by the Finance Committee and secondly, if any clubs are dissatisfied with what the Finance Committee gave them, they are heard by the Appeals Committee which is made up of Senators.

Senator Gerstenschlager: I’m curious if you ever talked about including the proposed budgets in this report or if that was too much?

President Custer: We discussed that but decided that it was probably getting too much into the weeds of what the Finance Committee should be doing. If we put too much into this report, it might discourage Senators from reading all of it. I think this is enough because we get to see what the clubs hear from the Finance Committee and can ask ourselves, “Does that not sit well with me for some reason?” The question that Speaker Brady asked about cutting things in half was a great question. If we don’t feel like we are getting a good enough explanation of things, we can work on the guidelines of the Finance Committee. I think this report strikes a good balance between too much and not enough information.

Treasurer Gratch: We are also reviewing applications for new members. They are due tomorrow, so if you know someone who is interested, get the word out to them by tomorrow!
c. Committee Ratifications

Nick Warren: I have three committees for you to ratify. I’m sorry that I couldn’t send out these names to you ahead of time via email.

*Environmental Affairs Committee (Lindsay Warne, Chair):*
Nina Buzby
Dylan McGarthwaite
Matthew Cloutier
Eliot Neal
Allie Cohen

*Athletic Affairs Committee (Katie Linder, Chair):*
Caitlin Carroll
Christopher Vandiford
Andrew Neary
Graham Kenter
Ethan Sivulich
Nicole Caci
Emma Hamilton
Benjamin Joers
Sarah Kravitz

*Constitution Committee (Zack Isaacs, Chair):*
Jamey Huffnagle
David Russell
Amari Simpson
Allison Forrest
Nitya Mankad
Bao Lin Xu
Robert Faselt
Nicholas Delehanthy
Caitlyn Meagher
Margot Graham
Trisha Singh
Terrence Smith

Nick Warren: One note about the Constitution Committee: there was a discrepancy between how the Constitution Committee has historically been formed and how the bylaws dictate that it should be done. We went with how it has been historically done which gives preference to previous members because of the knowledge they already have about how the process works.

Senator Gerstenschlager: What do the bylaws say?
Nick Warren: The bylaws say “The members of the SGACC are selected through an open application process, announced to the student body each semester. The committee is comprised of students from all four classes. All committee members serve for a period of one year. Committee members are ratified by the SGA Senate at the first Senate meeting of each semester.”

President Custer: I don’t think that the way the committee was formed was in contradiction to our bylaws, and I think that the person who is forming the committee gets flexibility about the criteria used to select the members. Those who were on the committee previously getting an edge is something worth considering because of the nature of what the Constitution Committee does. I don’t see a big conflict between what was done and what the bylaws said. Zach Isaacs, the Constitution Committee Chair, thought it was important to stick to tradition in the committee formation process.

Senator Jahan: Did everyone reapply?

Nick Warren: Before the applications were due, two members had not submitted applications. I wasn’t intimately involved in the process so I don’t know for sure.

Speaker Brady: Motion to ratify all three committees at once. President Custer: Seconded. 
Ayes: President Custer, Senator Gogineni, Senator Sanders, Senator Medina, Senator Judy, Senator Sohn, Senator Brook, Senator Vaughan, Senator Hussein, Senator Fisher, Senator De Toledo, Co-Chair Bogin, Speaker Brady
Nays: Senator Jahan, Senator Gerstenschlager, Senator Toy, Senator Chang
Abstentions: None.
13-4-0
Motion passes.

Vote to ratify the SGA Athletic Affairs, Environmental Affairs, and Constitution Committees.
Ayes: President Custer, Senator Gogineni, Senator Sanders, Senator Judy, Senator Sohn, Senator Brook, Senator Vaughan, Senator Fisher, Senator De Toledo, Co-Chair Bogin, Speaker Brady
Nays: Senator Jahan, Senator Gerstenschlager, Senator Toy, Senator Chang
Abstentions: Senator Medina, Senator Hussein
11-4-2
Committees ratified.

V. Old Business

a. F2014-SB1-Part 2: Constituency Outreach and Student Engagement Act-Office Hours Section

Speaker Brady: Last week, Co-Chair Bogin motioned to split F2014-SB1 into two parts and we already voted on the first part. Now, we’ll discuss the second part about office hours.
President Custer: I think I’ve said most of what I can say on this. One of the big issues is that there is a disconnect between the SGA and the student body at large. I’ve been talking to Danny a lot about bridging the gap and I think this is a big step in the right direction. I don’t think it asks that much more of the current Senators. Commons Senators already have to do it. Even if nobody comes for the whole year, the fact that we have them is a symbol of the SGA being concerned about the student body. I hope that you would want to have office hours anyways, but it might not be something that you would have thought about doing.

Senator Toy: I approve this bill and I think we can do this easily. I’m thinking about how our election was the only one that was contested and I think it was that way because I sent out a lot of emails and everyone knew my name and what I was doing. We don’t need to send a lot of pointless emails, but we should all be using the power to send emails to our entire constituency.

Co-Chair Bogin: I am firmly in support of office hours and connecting with the student body, but I also think that this bill represents more bureaucracy that the Senate is imposing on itself. I think office hours are important but I think that if nobody comes, they are not serving their purpose, and we are constricting ourselves. I know it’s just an hour a week, but I have a lot of things that I do for just an hour a week and all of those hours add up. I would propose a Friendly Amendment that after two weeks of nobody coming to your office hours, you have the option to cancel them. However, you would be welcome and encouraged to continue having office hours but it would be up to the individual. I held office hours on Sunday before our Senate meeting about a big controversial issue and not a single person showed up. I don’t want to be held to office hours if nobody cares.

President Custer does not accept Co-Chair Bogin’s Friendly Amendment.

Senator de Toledo: I would say that for equity sake, since the Commons Senators have to go to Commons Council, it makes sense that since we are representing the same amount of people, we should be held to the same standard. I think that adding an Amendment would add to the bureaucracy and would discourage people from holding office hours in a way that was accessible so that they could get those first two weeks out of the way.

President Custer: If nobody comes for the whole semester, I think it is still valuable that the opportunity is there. I do think that people will make use of them if it’s something consistent that the SGA does. I had my office hours written in the email about our tailgating meeting and I had nine people show up to talk to me about tailgating and a few other issues. People might not come initially because they aren’t well known, but eventually we will have everyone’s photos and office hours posted. It is a huge problem if the student body thinks that the SGA just sits and talks for an hour each week and doesn’t reach out to them. We need to figure out ways to combat that on campus and office hours are a great way to push back against that notion. I’m sure that we all have a lot of stuff to do, but it’s just one extra hour a week and if nobody shows up you can do your homework.

Senator Gogineni: Something that we could do along with photos would be to have a box for suggestions and we can look through them with our fellow Senator. Even if somebody adds in
foolish suggestions, we could easily weed those out. I would like to make a Friendly Amendment to add that.

President Custer does not accept Senator Gogineni’s Friendly Amendment.

President Custer: I don’t accept that because it doesn’t belong in the bylaws, but I do like that idea and we can work on that together.

Speaker Brady: Senator Judy and I have already set up office hours. It’s a good idea and it’s only an hour a week. I definitely think that the idea of us having our photos up is great and I want to put up some posters telling Febs to come to our office hours if they have ideas. I don’t think it is asking too much of us.

Senator Jahan: This is a great idea, but I do sympathize with Co-Chair Bogin about it being a waste of time. We should have the Director of Publicity putting out the information about our office hours so everyone knows about them.

President Custer: That will be one of the first thing that the Director of Publicity does, providing that we pass this bill. She’ll work on this.

Co-Chair Bogin: The opportunity is always there for them to come talk to us: my email and phone number are public and I live here. We are available but I know that some of us might not be well known. I think I’m quite well known on campus. We were in the same election and received the same amount of votes by definition. What I’m saying is that I don’t think we are inaccessible. As far as just sitting here for an hour and talking each week, that isn’t true, and I want to let everyone know that. Office hours are one way but it might not be the most effective.

Co-Chair Bogin: Motion to add Formal Amendment, which states that if no student shows up at office hours for two consecutive weeks, a Senator can cancel the office hours for that academic period.
No second.
Motion defeated.

Senator Fisher: I agree with what everyone says and while I am sympathetic to what Co-Chair Bogin proposed, I think it’s silly. We can all unanimously vote this down tonight and still have office hours every single week. There is nothing stopping us from doing that. I am hesitant to pass a bill that says we have to do something. The bill, in spirit, makes everyone eat their vegetables everyday and that is not what good government is.

President Custer: I see where you’re coming from with the vegetable comment. Some of things we pass in the Senate are so that we can get things done and office hours certainly do that but they also makes us seem like we are getting things done. If nobody comes, there is some value to the symbolism that we are listening. I think people will come. I had people coming to talk to me past the time that my office hours were set for. Even in the worst case, you don’t actually lose anything because you can do something useful for that hour and the benefit is that we are seen to be listening to the student body. In terms of adding another thing to our schedules, I think that all
of you do a lot and the Senate is a really strong group this year and that is not always the case. Not everyone is as motivated to do a good job and there are not that many requirements to being a Senator: if you aren’t a Commons Senator, all you have to do is show up to this meeting and nothing else. I don’t expect any of you to just do that, but you could. Commons Senators are forced to do more than that and I think there is a better level of discourse if something like this is institutionalized. I don’t think we should have to convince everyone to do this because it is under our purview as Senators.

Senator Vaughan: The only point where I have some hesitancy is if you require office hours you are hindering creativity for other venues that Senators could use to talk to their constituents. If they are forced to hold office hours, they won’t have incentive to have something creative like a dinner in Atwater. I think we should be able to change up our office hours. We could say, “I’m going to be at Trivia tonight,” or something. I think that would be a symbol of student engagement because while nobody might come to Proctor to see you, if you’re at an event on campus you are more approachable. It could be a good symbol to have office hours but I think if nobody shows up, then it’s a bad symbol to have nobody talking to a Senator while they’re sitting in Proctor for their office hours. What I’m proposing would have the same purpose of office hours but they would be more flexible and we can meet students where they are.

Senator Toy: As a First Year Senator, you have to put in an hour each week to meet with the First Year Committee and last year I put in more hours than that. It’s details like that which drag this down. I’d like to make a Friendly Amendment that we take out all of the requirements about a specific time and instead just require us to take an hour of our time each week. It can be up to the President and Senators to figure out what they want to do with that hour.

President Custer does not accept Senator Toy’s Friendly Amendment.

President Custer: I don’t accept that because I want consistency. I want students to know that their Senator will be in a certain place at a certain time each week, and given the amount of stuff everybody is already doing, I think that it will get confusing. Also, I wouldn’t want to go up and bother my Senator while they’re at Trivia and talk to them about tailgating for thirty minutes. I think you can do both. I don’t think this extra hour will be that much of a burden. You can still tell your constituency that you are going to Trivia, but there should be some consistency in the office hours. Students can stop by and see their Senators in Proctor instead of having to email them to set up a meeting because most students won’t do that.

Senator de Toledo: Motion to limit discussion on F2014-SB1-Part 2 to five minutes. Senator Chang: Seconded.
Ayes: President Custer, Senator Jahan, Senator Gerstenschlager, Senator Gogineni, Senator Sanders, Senator Toy, Senator Medina, Senator Judy, Senator Sohn, Senator Brook, Senator Vaughan, Senator Hussein, Senator Chang, Senator de Toledo, Co-Chair Bogin, Speaker Brady
Nays: Senator Fisher
Abstentions: None.
16-1-0
Motion passes.
Senator Jahan: Motion to vote on F2014-SB1-Part 2
Senator Gerstenschlager: Seconded.

Speaker Brady: Before we vote, I would just like to ask if Senator Toy and Senator Vaughan, who are on the list to speak, have any new things to offer to the conversation.

Senator Toy: I would like to make a Friendly Amendment that will exclude First Year Senators from this requirement because of their responsibility to the First Year Committee.

President Custer does not accept Senator Toy’s Friendly Amendment.

Senator Vaughan: A lot of what politicians do requires going out and meeting their constituents where they are and asking them what they want. I think it would be really cool if we pushed ourselves every week to do something different to connect with our constituents.

Senator Jahan: Motion to vote on F2014-SB1-Part 2
Senator Chang: Seconded.
Ayes: President Custer, Senator Jahan, Senator Gerstenschlager, Senator Gogineni, Senator Sanders, Senator Medina, Senator Judy, Senator Sohn, Senator Brook, Senator Vaughan, Senator Hussein, Senator Chang, Senator Fisher, Senator de Toledo, Co-Chair Bogin, Speaker Brady
Nays: None.
Abstentions: Senator Toy
16-0-1
Motion passes.

Vote on F2014-SB1-Part 2
Ayes: President Custer, Senator Jahan, Senator Gerstenschlager, Senator Gogineni, Senator Sohn, Senator Brook, Senator Hussein, Senator Chang, Senator de Toledo
Nays: Senator Sanders, Senator Toy, Senator Medina, Senator Judy, Senator Vaughan, Senator Fisher, Co-Chair Bogin
Abstentions: Speaker Brady
9-7-1
F2014-SB1-Part 2 passes.

President Custer: Let me know by Friday when and where you will be holding your office hours.

b. We the Middkids

Chief of Staff Zhang: We’re going to talk less about the actual petitions and more about what we want to do with the petitions. We should decide on a threshold for what the number of votes should be before we discuss an idea in the Senate. The Chief of Staff has been replying to these and I will continue to do that but we have a lot of outstanding petitions that we have not resolved. What do we want to do with them? The petition about AAL has over 700 votes and I
don’t think it would be wise to get rid of that because it is a good record. What should I do with the other petitions?

Senator Toy: What are the counts that we looked at before?

Chief of Staff Zhang: Last year, President Liddell and the Senate decided that if a petition reached 100 votes, then we would bring it up in the Senate. If there were 300 votes, the President had to issue a response. On some of them we took concrete action, like the Café in BiHall and AAL, which we did a lot of work on. Right now, you can give up to 3 votes for any petition and you can vote on an unlimited amount of petitions. I think we should change it so that one person gets one vote.

Senator De Toledo: Do we have the discretion to not talk about things like the Chateau Moat?

Chief of Staff Zhang: I will bring it up in Senate but we don’t have to talk about it any more than that. In my response, I can say that I brought it up in Senate but that it isn’t feasible or relevant.

President Custer: I recommend that we choose a vote threshold and then I should respond to it like I did with the tailgating petition where everyone got an email about it. One thing that I found frustrating is that the Chief of Staff would respond and basically say that we were talking about it, but then nothing would get done and no follow-up would be posted on We the Middkids. It perpetuates the perception that we talk a lot but not a lot happens. I am hesitant to respond and say that we are discussing it. We should discuss it and then respond to it.

Senator Toy: In the interest of time, I am okay with the President or the Cabinet responding to these because I know we talk about things for a long time here and we wouldn’t get through all of them. A lot of these you could do on your own and aren’t things we need everyone to talk about.

Senator Chang: Last year, the responses were all basically the same and it was discouraging and I also think that it would be great if we invited them to the meeting where we would be discussing that issue and also invite them to office hours.

Chief of Staff Zhang: I want the discretion to respond to these and I can tell you about what you will be interested in like suddenly if “Don’t allow Public Safety into dorm rooms without invitation” gets 1,000 new votes, then I will bring it up to you. I take full responsibility for those repetitive responses. I think how Jake did it in the spring was great and I want to follow what he was doing in being more specific.

Senator Chang: I think yours and Jake’s responses were both subpar.

Chief of Staff Zhang: Duly noted.

Senator Jahan: Senators, we should be checking this website often because it is a big part of how our constituents reach out to us. We can even do this during our office hours if we don’t have anything else to do.
c. Senate Rule Modification

President Custer: One thing that is frustrating is that during discussion, anyone can grab the floor and motion to vote and the five people who were waiting to speak don’t get to say anything. There are some good things about actual government that we should copy, but I think this is unnecessary. I would like to propose that we give Speaker Brady the discretion, after a vote has been called, to allow Senators to speak if they haven’t had a chance to discuss something. I think it is important that everyone is able to speak. Also, we can remove the Speaker at any time with a majority vote if anybody thinks that he is abusing his power.

Senator de Toledo: I think we should emphasize that if they are going to speak after a vote has been called, they should be new points.

Speaker Brady: I acted preemptively earlier in the meeting in asking Senator Vaughan and Senator Toy if they had anything new to say and I will continue to emphasize that in these cases, Senators only speak if they are going to say something that hasn’t already been said.

President Custer: This increases his discretion as Speaker but if he abuses it, we can take it back.

Speaker Brady: If you think I’m abusing this power or not being fair, please let me know.

Senator Medina: I support this. I was trying to get a word in earlier about Office Hours but Co-Chair Bogin’s Friendly Amendment interrupted the flow of conversation so I couldn’t talk.

Chief of Staff Zhang: This isn’t something that we will vote on, just come to a consensus on.

Senator Chang: Distinguishing between what is new and not new is a blurry line because you can reference something that is old. You should have the right to bring up a new point even if it’s about something old.

Speaker Brady: It will be fine as long as the argument is new and it hasn’t already been said.

VII. New Business

a. J-Term Student-Wide Survey Questions

President Custer: Start thinking now about what questions you would want to ask on the survey this January. Chief of Staff Zhang is handing out examples of the questions asked on the survey two years ago. I don’t want anyone to think about this too late and say that they didn’t have an opportunity to get their questions on the survey because I can foresee that happening. Start thinking now about what policy changes you want to make and formulate your questions so that they can provide us with good evidence to give to the administration. We only want to include questions that are related to things we can and will act upon.
Speaker Brady: These can be reviewed in your own time. You are encouraged to come back with comments so we can discuss them formally.

Chief of Staff Zhang: These will also be emailed to everybody.

VII. Adjournment

Speaker Brady: Motion to adjourn.
Senator Fisher: Seconded.
Ayes: President Custer, Senator Jahan, Senator Gerstenschlager, Senator Gogineni, Senator Sanders, Senator Toy, Senator Medina, Senator Judy, Senator Sohn, Senator Brook, Senator Vaughan, Senator Hussein, Senator Fisher, Senator de Toledo, Co-Chair Bogin, Speaker Brady
Nays: None.
Abstentions: Senator Chang
16-0-1
Meeting adjourned.