SGA Minutes
October 5, 2014

I. Attendance

All members present; proxy for Senator Jahan.

II. Acceptance of Minutes

Senator Gerstenschlager: Motion to accept the minutes.
Senator de Toledo: Seconded.
All aye.
Minutes accepted.

III. Announcements

President Custer: Thanks everybody for sending in your office hours to Chief of Staff Zhang. Robin will update the bulletin board by the end of the week so your name, face and office hours will be posted there. One more announcement is that we won’t have a Senate meeting next week because of Fall Break.

IV. Committee Reports

No Committee Reports to discuss.

V. Old Business

No Old Business to discuss.

VI. New Business

a. SGA Liaison to the SGA on Endowment Affairs (Senators Chang and Vaughan)

Vaughan: We chose Ian Rhee as the Liaison to the SGA on Endowment Affairs. What we want to talk about now is the process because there was a general consensus that we need to refine the process and better define what the position is and what it means. Senator Chang and I came up with some suggestions to start a dialogue about this. What it says is pretty vague and there is definitely a place for that but there is also a place to be more concrete. It says that they will be the official student body liaison to the Investment Committee. This person is a representative and we chose them without knowledge of student opinion. We just guessed and I don’t really think that’s enough to go off when choosing a representative. This is one of only two students who gets to be in the room with the Investment Committee that controls our endowment and the endowment controls everything we do and is what we will donate to eventually. We want the Board of Trustees to understand our opinion. We want to improve the process so that student concerns are accounted for. The first suggestion we have is making this an elected position. The Co-Chair of Community Council is elected and is a really important position, and so is this. If we
are going to shoot for student voices being heard, this is the best way. Another option is to more clearly define how they gauge student opinion: they could send out a mandated survey each year. They could also be mandated to hold town meetings before or after Board of Trustees meetings to have dialogue with students. We should have a general consensus that they need to represent the students and then decide what would be best for the student body.

Senator Toy: I like this idea but I don’t think that the Board of Trustees will be okay with this. From my understanding, the SGA representative just sits and listens.

Senator Vaughan: The only check that the Board of Trustees has on this is that the person cannot relay proprietary information. So if they can’t really tell us anything, then what is the point? The only channel that we are involved is that our representative can say what they want.

Doug Adams: It’s a great question to ask but it will require diplomacy in asking it. They ask the students to give input on what students are saying. They can’t reveal sensitive information, but how much information we want them to have is a great question.

Senator Sanders: I like this and I think the second and third suggestions are great. I don’t think it’s that important if the position is elected because there is only so much that the whole student body can know about someone’s endowment opinion. It could be difficult to figure out where one person stands. I think the survey is a great clear and concise way to get answers about student opinion and I think that meetings before and after, depending on the information, would be useful.

Senator Fisher: I am strongly against making this an elected position for two reasons. Firstly, this conversation has illustrated that it is difficult to understand what they do and if the SGA has trouble understanding, it’s too big of a question to be asking students. Also, the skill set to win an election is different than the skill set needed to be a liaison to the Board of Trustees. We want them to be represented and an election assures that. However, we are elected and if we choose the SLSEA then that suffices — there is enough representation and we are hearing the voice of students. It would be imprudent to make this an elected position.

Senator Vaughan: Students don’t understand this position but I think this is addressing that because if students aren’t engaged with the issue and there aren’t forums, then how will students understand and how can we have someone be a representative? We need to add in the element of them being able to educate everyone about the endowment. We are representatives and this is a complicated nuanced issue and that’s why this position is there. We should take a hard look at this because yes, we are representatives, but it may take actually enhancing the position to make it effective.

Senator Gerstenschlager: I agree with Senator Fisher about the skill set and I don’t think it needs to be elected. I like the town meeting idea and the survey idea but I wonder if questions like this were already included in the Student Life Survey?

Chief of Staff Zhang: There was a section about it with three or four questions. They asked if students supported principles of socially responsible investing and what kinds of socially
responsible investing they want to support. Around 60% were in favor of socially responsible investing at the time.

Senator Chang: In response to Senator Fisher, people will understand. If we build it, they will come. I don’t think people know what Ben does necessarily, but they know who he is. In regards to skill set, I just want this to be a conversation about how to improve this position. Senator Vaughan and I aren’t pushing anything. The pros might be that they will have to have a platform and discuss issues and what those issues are. They also might have to hold office hours. The cons would be that it’s just another election and the skill set might not match up. Pros of the survey would bet that there are no transaction costs. The cons are that it might not happen fast enough because endowment ideas might change pretty quickly.

Speaker Brady: I understand some of the principles that you are talking about but I don’t know if making this into an election is going to solve anything or increase the acumen of the person we are choosing. It seems to me that as Senators, this is our job and we are supposed to be doing research on what our constituents think. The survey is a direct way to do this but if we want the SGA to have a face, we have to go and talk to our constituents and ask what they want. We can do both—they aren’t mutually exclusive—but it sounds like more bureaucracy to have an elected position. More voting and procedure might slow things down.

Senator Chang: I think you are right, but it’s a position where we have some power and we aren’t using it. The Board of Trustees had power over where we could put the Bike Fix-it Station that we’ve been working on. They have a lot of power. And in terms of us asking our constituents, none of that is happening. There isn’t enough student opinion represented. Senators representing constituents is fine but Senators need to be more informed.

Senator Vaughan: In theory, we should be talking to them, but we don’t have the ability to do that. That makes it difficult, but I think it will be really powerful if they have forums. It won’t be more bureaucracy because the position already exists. It simply enforces what they should be doing in a clearer way and makes sure that they do what it says they should do.

President Custer: I want to require more of the liaison and I think that the forum and survey are great ideas. In terms of being elected, there are issues with that and the most recent election picks out what those problems will be. A lot of us ran unopposed and to add another position that will be elected is asking a lot. Students should know that these are the people who represent their voices and we need to hold the fewest amount of people responsible for doing that. Also, right now we only have the SLSEA but hopefully we can have representatives on other committees and making this an elected position sets a tough precedent for having all of those representatives being elected. That being said, there were a lot of issues with how it was done this time and we were lucky to get such a good person despite having a bad process. I am more inclined to have the Senate as a whole vote on the person. They could bring three or four applicants and we can interview each one or allow Senators to ask them questions and hopefully get a better result. It is a Senators job to know what student opinion is and to be held accountable if they make a bad decision. I think the broader Senate, instead of just a small committee, getting a vote makes the most sense.
Senator Toy: I agree with President Custer. Elections are not necessary. If the person we choose sends out a survey, it is their job to reflect the ideas of that survey and what students want and he can send it out twice a year around the time of the meeting. It will be more surveys but the people who care will actually take them.

Speaker Brady: I want to play the devil’s advocate. I think that transparency is a good thing and these reports and meetings are good ideas. I just have doubts about how much attention these meetings will get when an issue as sexy as the tailgating scandal could only get maybe 20 people in meeting. I agree that it might be good if we have an open forum in the Senate and I also agree that it is a lot to ask to have everyone know about us while also adding additional candidates to the ballot.

Senator Vaughan: We were just putting the idea of an election on the table, but it seems like there is a consensus that it isn’t going to happen. Let’s move forward from that idea. The forums would be different because the endowment isn’t tailgating. There are a lot of students who have questions about the endowment and I think that we could have a good showing at these meetings, especially if we talk to professors and have them tell their students about it. If nobody comes, then whatever. It still shows that we are representing the students. I think that if a person is going to have that responsibility, they should have to hold a forum and have meetings similar to office hours.

Senator de Toledo: One worry that I have is with the survey itself because the more surveys that you put out, the less responses you get. The Student Life Survey is once every two years. Once it becomes too often, people stop doing them, like they stop reading emails when they get too many. I think we should just be cautious about that.

Senator Chang: If anybody wants to talk about this with me, let me know.

b. LaundryView (Senator Toy)

Senator Toy: The two point people in the administration are bad at emails but I finally got some sort of answer. The Senate passed something about this a couple years ago and nothing happened. We’re trying to get LaundryView by Mac-Gray which allows you to go online and check and see which machines are being used and which aren’t working so you can better plan your laundry day. Most of the NESCACs have this or something similar. It will probably happen here eventually, it is just a matter of who is going to pay for it. The cost will be $6,897 annually, not including the cost to install Ethernet. It’ll be $2.75 per machine per month. Would we be open to paying for that?

Senator Gerstenschlager: I am in support of this because I live on a part of campus, the Mods, where laundry is inaccessible. It’s very frustrating to bring my laundry up the hill to campus and have all of the machines filled. I definitely think it’s worth $6,800 a year.

Senator Fisher: I personally think this is ridiculous, but I think my constituents would think this is great. If I were to ask them if they would want to spend that much on it, I think a fair amount would say no and I think that the administration should pay for it. There are better ways to spend
our money. I know that a lot of students would use this, but I’ve lived in Ross, which is like Laundry-topia so I’ve never had any issues. Personally, this irks me, but I know that my constituents would probably like it.

Senator de Toledo: I lived in a building with no laundry machine for three years so this would be helpful for me, but this shouldn’t be something that the SAF pays for. It would be a serious expense and I would argue that we have too few laundry machines or at least a misallocation because there are so many in Forest. This is especially important in winter when you live somewhere without laundry. We should not give the administration the option of us paying for it for ourselves.

Co-Chair Bogin: I agree that the Senate shouldn’t pay for it and I think that we should at least work on the issue that a huge part of the campus uses the same laundry machines in Forest. It would be great to have this system though, but it would be nice to see the Ethernet numbers.

Senator Chang: I agree that the administration should pay for this. Also yesterday, I was doing laundry and two of the machines were broken and there were no signs. There should be tags so that you could get reimbursed and those tags aren’t anywhere. In general, laundry is harder than it needs to be so regardless of whether or not we pursue LaundryView, we should talk to the administration to improve the laundry system.

Senator Toy: I think we could spin it and say that this will help the administration figure out which machines are broken faster because half the time that machines are broken, people just move on to the next one. Also Forest is always filled because a third of the school goes there to do their laundry. I agree that the administration should pay and I will push to have that happen.

President Custer: So it would be $6,900 per year and then Ethernet is one time cost?

Senator Toy: Ethernet is a one-time cost, which might be kind of cheap. It will depend on whether or not there is a plug. There are 13 locations now that have laundry and 4 new machines in KDR. The administration should pay for this, but it is a great service and if they say that they will never pay for it, it is useful for us to consider paying from the SAF. That is definitely possible and we need to ask ourselves if we would pay for this if that happens. The Senate can spend money out of the reserves with a vote essentially. If they won’t pay for it, will we?

Senator Fisher: No, absolutely not. I appreciate the point about the broken machines, but if Student A and Student B both see that a machine is free and they walk up hill both ways to get there to use the machine, we are stuck with the same problem of there not being enough machines. This doesn’t solve that problem. I think that leaving things to fate is thrilling in a way. I want to be careful of sanitizing the college experience. It’s a little rough, and for a lot of us it’s the first time we do laundry by ourselves and I think being able to get on our phones and check the status of the machines takes away from that.

Senator Vaughan: If we are to pay for it, it needs to be like Papercut where each person is allotted a certain amount of money.
Senator Toy: Everybody will still be paying for their own laundry. You just check and see if a machine is being used or is broken, that’s all. In response to Senator Fisher, we are logical people and we know that if there is only one machine, we can’t be that upset if someone gets to it first. It would be better to wait until more machines are ready.

Senator Brook: We are talking about $7,000 for a program, but why can’t we figure this out in a more practical way? Instead of figuring out if a machine is free, why don’t we just buy a new laundry machine?

Senator Gerstenschlager: Can we monitor usage patterns? Maybe instead of spending money, we can redistribute the machines. We could do like the Finance Committee does and pay for only half of the machines.


Senator de Toledo: I am hesitant because this is $7,000 a year and we have had enough trouble on the FC paying for MiddView as it is. It’s tough because it ties up a lot of money and adding another $7,000 isn’t going to make it easier. The SAF is for student activities so this doesn’t seem like a good way to spend it.

Co-Chair Bogin: There is an infrastructure problem and we have as many laundry machines as we can have without retrofitting changes. I’m sure if President Liebowitz said that we needed more machines and we could spend whatever to make it happen, it would happen. However, it will be more than just buying a washer.

Senator Chang: The administration should still pay for it—it isn’t that big of an amount. I think it would set a weird precedent for us to pay for it and moving forward, we should look at laundry as a whole. Could we make a committee to do that?

President Custer: You can form an ad hoc committee—the SGA has done that in the past. Senator Toy could chair and other students can be on the committee as well and they can do some more research on this. Senator Gerstenschlager made a good point about whether or not the issue is that there are not enough machines or if it’s just because we are all doing laundry at the same time. I don’t know what our capacity is, but everybody does laundry on Sunday afternoon so it’s going to be hard to find a machine at that time. This will end up being more about convenience than the fundamentals of having enough machines. To put this in perspective, $7,000 is less than 1% of the Student Activities Fee, but for the administration, it’s less than a rounding error.

President Custer: Motion to have a straw poll on the question: If the administration won’t pay for LaundryView, would you vote to have the SGA pay in full for it?
Senator Fisher: Seconded.
2-13-2

Senator Toy: Thank you. That will help. And in response to Senator de Toledo, MiddView will be done soon and if we have a lot of money, we should spend it on something that will be useful
for students. Also, we are technically within the industry standards for machines per person, so what President Arnowitz said wasn’t correct. I think the placement of the machines is just weird.

c. Financial Aid and External Scholarships (Senator Toy)

Senator Toy: Last year, President Custer and I looked at this. It’s more complicated this, but basically if you have an outside scholarship, it takes a way from your work-study and your grant. I had a meeting with Jackie Davis and she was very clear and open with me. Since we are a need-based financial aid institution, we can’t over-give students money, so that’s why it takes out of the grant. We should pass something as the Senate and Jackie will look at it so that when President Liebowitz sees it, he takes it seriously. We determine need differently than the Fed does. We can say that we should reduce only up until the Federal aid law. Sometimes the Fed will give more and sometimes they will give less than Middlebury does. I realize this doesn’t affect a lot of students. Also, Middlebury gets audited and will get in trouble if its decided that they are overfunding students.

Senator Fisher: I think that you are right. My understanding is that work-study and loans go first and the grant is only taken from after the rest is exhausted.

Senator Toy: That is the gist of it. It is complicated because the Feds are involved. I think there should be more transparency on how this works because most students are pissed when they find out that this is happening. It is illogical, but we are need-based and our package is not the same as everyone else’s. Because we meet full need, we cannot over-reward students. We can take away what the student has to pay at least until it gets to the Federal need level.

Senator Chang: I think this is one of the most important things that we could ever do. I told my constituents that I was really interested in this when I was running. I have friends who have reconsidered going here because of this. It affects so many students. I can’t understand how this works and I would be interested in meeting with Senators and meeting with whoever is in charge of Financial Aid.

Chief of Staff Zhang: I saw a number of confused faces. I work as a senior fellow and I am on financial aid so I know a bit about this. The FASFA is the form you have to fill out for any student who applies for Federal aid or aid from Middlebury. The proportion of students on aid is around 44% and it’s rising. For some perspective, it’s 48% for this freshman year class, it was 42% for my class, and it was around 27% a decade ago. Most of the financial aid package is a grant, but you also get work-study and loans. I think work-study is around $1,800 for 10 hours a week. The loans are progressive: they are capped at $1,000 for families making under $50,000, $2,000 for those making between $50,000 - $80,000 and $3,000 for those making above $80,000. They ensure that no student will graduate with more than $12,000 in loans. The average amount of aid was just under $41,000 of the people who got aid in this class.

Senator Toy: It is a complicated issue so please ask me any questions. The difference this could make would only be around $1,000 - $2,000 per student because that would be the difference between the FASFA need level and Middlebury’s need level. It would be relatively small given that tuition is $60,000, but I still think this is really important.
President Custer: I agree with Senator Toy that this is an important issue and it would take a lot of work and federal regulation makes it difficult to change anything. I see the justification for taking it out of the loan and the work study, but it is incomprehensible to me that if your family can afford to pay the whole tuition and you get a scholarship, you get to keep it when the person on financial aid who gets a scholarship gets a net zero. It removes any incentive for someone on financial aid to apply for merit based scholarships even if they could win them. It’ll depend on how the numbers play out and even if it should be done, it might not be possible. The administration might not be willing to have that level of risk. I am willing to work on this though.

Speaker Brady: I think we can have a more meaningful conversation about this once we get concrete numbers.

Senator Fisher: I think that it’s imperative that we make this institution as accessible to every human being who qualifies as possible. I love that we can honestly say that we only have need-based aid. If what we’re talking about comes to be the policy of the college, we can no longer say that. Say that Student A and Student B are both on financial aid and they both get the same amount of aid from the college. Now, if Student A gets a merit based scholarship and Student B doesn’t, then Student A has to pay less than Student B. Now, need is no longer the only factor—merit is also in there.

Senator Toy: It would take a lot more work but it would be possible. It also won’t affect Middlebury’s amounts of money. They just give out money and then they calculate it afterwards. What Senator Fisher brought up...that’s how it works if you get a scholarship: if it takes off your loans and work study and doesn’t go any further, it would still be meeting need.

Speaker Brady: Motion to limit debate to ten minutes.

Senator Gerstenschlager: Seconded.

Ayes: Senator Jahan, Senator Gerstenschlager, Senator Gogineni, Senator Sanders, Senator Toy, Senator Judy, Senator Sohn, Senator Brook, Senator Vaughan, Senator Hussein, Senator de Toledo, Co-Chair Bogin, Speaker Brady

Nays: President Custer, Senator Fisher

Abstentions: Senator Medina, Senator Chang

13-2-2

Motion passes

Senator Gerstenschlager: I have two quick things to talk about. This week, Nalia and I wrote a draft to support the Intercultural Center. Most of us were pretty blindsided by the article in The Campus and I know we had been talking about this during the retreat. Any input on this would be great. Email your suggestions to Nalia and me because the SGA should have an opinion on this. The second thing is MiddSafe. A fellow senior on the swim team, Maddy Berkman, came and trained us about bystander intervention. Teams party together and now there are 70-80 of us who are aware of what to do in a situation like that. I think this is something that every team should do because it was not a requirement for us to do this. We will bring a bill to the Senate soon about this.
Senator Toy: It is mandatory now for all freshmen and for ResLife.

Senator de Toledo: I think this is a great idea.

Co-Chair Bogin: We should just ask Erin Quinn about this. He is great and really open to everything.

Speaker Brady: Read over these bills everybody. Is there any more New Business to discuss?

Katharine Reineman: I am the one who posted the We The Middkids Petition about Heinz ketchup. Check it out at go/heinzforall. We have Hunts, which is inferior. In Atwater, they put Hunts in the Heinz containers, so it makes you wonder what else they are doing in terms of mislabeling food. I also wrote an op-ed in the newspaper about this. I don’t really know what you guys really do or how much input you have, but I think it would be nice if we could explore the ketchup issue. It potentially isn’t that much more expensive in bulk. I did an informal straw poll of my friends and everyone prefers Heinz.

President Custer: I am sympathetic as a Pittsburg Steelers fan and I recommend reaching out to the new head of dining services if you want to see this changed. Heinz would also get mad if they knew they were putting Hunts in Heinz bottles, so hopefully they don’t read these minutes.

Katharine Reineman: Would I be effective talking to dining services as an ordinary student?

President Custer: I think so—just reach out. I think the cost might be the big issue.

Co-Chair Bogin: I work in the Atwater kitchen and the reason they use the Heinz bottles is because they are really food for dispensing ketchup. Dan Detora is the new head of dining services, but you can also talk to the head chefs because they are the ones who order everything and they are really receptive. We could pass a resolution here about this but it might be better to just have a meeting with some of the people in dining services.

Senator Chang: Last year the EAC and IAC worked on getting a Bike Fix-it Station. We’ve been working on it for about 12 months and it’s finally going up. It will be near ADK and it’s green. It holds your bike and has basic tools so when your bike breaks you can fix it on campus. We will have some publicity about it too when it goes up. Congratulations Senate on getting something done!

Nick Warren: I have one more committee for you to ratify and it’s the Institutional Diversity Committee chaired by Jeremy Stratton-Smith. There were 13 applicants and 10 were selected.

Institutional Diversity Committee
   Viviana Altamirano
   Michael Berstein
   Zeke Caceres
   Aliza Cohen
President Custer: Motion to ratify the Institutional Diversity Committee.
Senator Toy: Seconded.
All aye.
Committee ratified.

Speaker Brady: Also, we aren’t discussing it this week, but think about questions for the Student Life Survey and we will talk about that in two weeks.

VII. Adjournment

Senator de Toledo: Motion to adjourn.
Senator Gerstenschlager: Seconded.
All aye.
Meeting adjourned.