SGA Minutes: October 11, 2015

7:00PM

I. Attendance


II. Acceptance of Minutes

   a. To include the four members for the ad hoc committee into the minutes: Senator Sohn, Senator Edwards, Senator Rainey, and Senator Chen

   b. To amend the typo Senator Jigar to Senator Bhakta

Speaker Gogineni: Motion to accept new the minutes
Senator Chen: Seconded
Minutes have been accepted

III. Announcements

Speaker Gogineni: Due to the format for speaking time, please wait for us to call on you. Michael and I have a running list of people who have spoke. This rule does not apply to updates from the President and executive session.

President Gratch: For those who don’t know, the SGA funded The Lodge for $40,000. They received the permitting, but we think it’s best if they come in to present again. We just want to make sure everything is great and maybe set a deadline.

Senator Singh: Can we have a deadline to have it finished?

Brady: You could theoretically write a new bill to withdraw the support, but that sets a precedent of SGA being an unreliable source of support. It wouldn’t be in our best interest to do so.

President Gratch: A couple of weeks ago, you all shared your input about transportation and we would like to pilot a student driver to Burlington during Thanksgiving break for students who are on campus. It’d be on Black Friday. It’d be inexpensive, maybe even free. If you are interested to be a part of that process or even the driver, please let me know.
President Gratch: Tomorrow morning, Michael, Carolyn and I are meeting up with the senior group—Patton and her vice presidents. It’d be about communication between students and the administration. I spent some time thinking about it, but I would like to know if any of you have any additional ideas so I can bring to the table tomorrow. We would like to set a tone to see whether we can run ideas between the SGA and administration. I’d love to hear some thoughts you all have. Now would be the chance to speak up.

Senator Rainey: How often does the SGA meet with the administration?

President Gratch: Hypothetically, I meet with her once every two weeks.

President Gratch: Now onto other news. I just met with the cabinet before this meeting, and they are all very successful. If you're interested, you can contact them about their committees. Lily can put up 5 bullet points of what’s been happening in the SGA also on Facebook and it’d be very informal. Also, please share the updates from Facebook so people can see.

IV. Old Business

No old business.

V. New Business

Co-chair Chang: Welcome to those who are new in Senate. I’m going to show a video and it’s something I watched two years ago and it changed my views on Middlebury. The video is called Abroad at Home: Accounts of the Invisible produced as a thesis project by Tim Garcia.

Co-chair Chang: Does anyone want to share some of his or her thoughts?

Senator Allis: I feel I have failed some of my really good friends in certain aspects. Sometimes I get caught being a listener and an ally. I don’t want to speak from experience because I don’t understand which leads to silence.

Senator Rainey: I related with a lot of the things from the video. A lot of the time it is experienced as a freshman. I come from the South and Middlebury and Vermont both seem so progressive, but truth is there are different forms of racism or blatant prejudices. I prefer overt over covert. I dropped a class because someone asked me if I went to a predominantly black school. The video made me realize that I’m not the only one going through this. There seems to be a blind spot where everyone is trying to one up one another. The sore spots are getting smaller while blind spots
are getting bigger and bigger. We must take an introspective look if we don’t want to face the same problems.

Senator Boyle: In my first year seminar last year, it was filled with white students from NE discussing about the South. I remembered one student asking, “Why is a black woman always so angry?” I feel like when political correctness fades away, repulsive things comes out. We can continue to pretend there’s political correctness or the problems won’t go away.

Senator Chen: There is a term called token Asian table where most Asians sit together, and people refer it to “all the people out of china.” And it’s the same for all ethnicities and people question things like, “why do all the black kids sit together? Are they self segregating?” There was an incident where I was in class. People said hi to each other, but won’t say hi to me. I feel like there’s this extra step people need to take. It’s easier to connect as the same race. Something that caught my attention was on Yik Yak. A professor quoted an African American and the comment on Yik Yak was, “My professor can’t be anymore white.” That’s something that’s worth considering.

Senator Sohn: When Carr Hall changed, I was just wondering what’s the reason for that and how it can be used as a vehicle for change?

Senator Raber: I think the main reason is for it to be a creative space for students who feel they have a space to go on campus. It’s for people who feel uncomfortable elsewhere on campus. But the bigger question is for students who have gone to a school with a lack of diversity, how do you open them to know ignorance or empathize for other people? This video is a great first step to reach others who are unfamiliar with this topic.

Kevin Tsai (Proxy for Senator Han): I know ten people who would watch this video and would laugh about it. I think part of the issue is just a numbers game. So many of us come from prep schools and many come from feeder schools. I had never felt out of place, but yet I am in an economics class where I do feel like what they do in the video. It’s natural when you’re different from everyone else. With me, I’m currently working on this. The fact that I’m different just makes me feel bad and it’s inherent in everybody.

Senator Rainey: I had a situation on my hall where I was referred to as the “n” word and instead of blowing up on them, I was actually more offended by the questions that came after it and told them it was not okay. When you’re trying to educate people, the questions are more disrespectful because of the ignorance that comes along with it. What are we doing to get more diversity onto campus? It doesn’t seem like admissions is not
taking any forms of action on this because it’s still a problem on campus. Also, why isn’t this part of our education?

Kevin Tsai (Proxy for Senator Han): I think you do bring up a good point. I think in terms of education, people would just reject it. The more you try to educate, the more they’ll get annoyed. One has to realize themselves about these issues.

Senator Parikh: Just for me personally, I found it shocking but it’s in line with a lot of things I’ve seen. In this country, there seems to be a mentality of groups vs. another group. It seems like all groups have different mentalities. I was taught that instead of thinking about what groups they are from, I think of what they have to say and as individuals. Coming here, it seems like that’s what people do—they have this “us vs. them” mentality. It is troubling, but the bigger question is, “What caused this mentality and how was it instilled into people?”

Senator Boyle: To answer Rainey’s question, there are reports about underrepresented students applying to these types of schools. They have taken measures with having Posse Los Angeles and also working on targeting groups that may need full scholarships. If you are a student applying for college and you come from a prep school, Middlebury would be on the top of your list. If you go to a school like the one I went to, it’s not even a choice. Not many people apply to places like Middlebury where I am from.

Senator von Platen: At Justalks, the moderators tried to talk about topics that are less spoken about. At least in my group, it seems like people can sympathize but not empathize. Justalks is where it’s okay to talk about these issues but not do anything about them.

Speaker Gogineni: The Asian experience doesn’t necessarily fit into the white experience or black experience. It’s like we forget about them. No one ever talks about how they’re feeling on campus. While this topic is about race and ethnic background, a bigger factor is socioeconomic status because often you come in freshman year and school is already divided already. Others may have the privilege to play certain type of sports. Some may go skiing during J-term or the Bahamas for spring break. These experiences have already divided students, and to a larger extent, it’s harder to make friends during freshman year because it’s hard to empathize with people or understand different people’s backgrounds.

Senator Rizal: Yes, Middlebury is not the most diverse place, but it’s more diverse than most places. We should also remember that we have these types of conversations. There are places that are more racist and sexist places than Middlebury. Another point—are we talking about one race vs. another or are we talking about general human nature? I think people
need to be a bit more humble and a bit kinder. Yes you may be different, but if you’re kind and I’m kind, that’s something to bond over. That’s just some basic human emotions that we can bring onto the table. People should also be willing to listen and be more loving, so we can all be more open.

Senator Raber: I actually disagree. You can say there are worst places, but that’s not the way to grow. Why are we comparing ourselves to them and not places that are better? I understand your point about showing more kindness and be more understanding, but I don’t think that’s going to go anywhere because you can’t expect that from people.

Senator Rainey: I just want to say that people who are subconsciously racist are still good people. I think people can be nice yet also not unconsciously racist. There should be encouragements for a dialogue, but it’s not happening. I think that’s the main issue and it’ll continue to be dismissed if we don’t talk about it.

Senator Chen: We also need to be actively listening. We also should be actively asking questions instead of just guessing or assuming. When people look at Asians, they think model minority, but not all people conform to that generalization. I don’t know how to encourage those types of conversations, but I think the willingness to listen is important.

Chief of Staff Brady: I have a question: Do you think making it mandatory to have conversations like Justalks is important?

Speaker Gogineni: I read an article saying the curriculum of liberal arts education is making people too culturally sensitive. The way things are taught in liberal arts makes you look at things in a neutral perspective and to not offend anyone and that creates silence. There is a need for a more comprehensive curriculum that would allow people to have an opinion and then implement something like Justalks along with that.

Senator Rainey: What if we, as a group of people in the SGA, encourage the administration to reach out to different groups of people to apply so it can grow organically? By having these talks for just one day won’t solve our problems.

Senator Rizal: I think it’ll help. Having one day of Justalks won’t change the issues, but it may set the tone.

President Gratch: If anyone missed President Patton’s speech during inauguration, you should consider watching it online. It embodied her goals for the upcoming years, and a lot was about resilience, respect, and
wisdom. I think it is encouraging to know that our President is thinking about these types of things.

Senator Parikh: I agree that maybe starting the dialogue like Justalks is very important, but I also agree with Senator Rainey that maybe it’s not enough. Something that comes to mind is that people jumps to assumptions. I wonder why people do this and how it started. I wonder whether as an institution that we can work on that as a whole.

Senator Rainey: We have the Green Dot Initiative, and it’s very effective. If that’s what we want to do, can we implement something similar to Green Dot?

Senator Sohn: I think it’s great that we’re trying to improve as a whole, but I don’t think we should expect that people who come on campus wants to change the campus. They should want to change before they arrive.

Speaker Gogineni: Maybe we can all come up with one idea to see what is one thing we can do to change the atmosphere of race. What is something we can actually implement instead of something philosophical? And Ilana can pass this on to President Patton.

Co-chair Chang: To some extent, we may have experienced something on a varying degree. What does it all mean to us?

Chief of Staff Grady: Can you all raise your hands if you have submitted legislation? If you haven’t, please work on it.

Speaker Gogineni: It’s not just about writing bill, there’s so much that you can do all campus also.

VI. Adjournment

Senator Boyle: Motion to adjourn

All seconded motion.

Meeting adjourned: 8:21 pm