SGA Minutes: October 18, 2015
Meeting Time: 7:02 PM

I. Attendance

II. Acceptance of Minutes
Speaker Gogineni: Motion to accept minutes
Senator Boyle: Seconded
Minutes have been accepted.

III. Announcements
President Gratch: Does anyone have any announcements?

Senator Edwards: This is informal, but in light of complaints about Middlebury’s hookup culture, I think it’d be great if SGA could host a campus wide speed dating event.

Speaker Gogineni: I work for Crossroads, and we were thinking of doing something for Valentine’s Day. Let me know if you think we can formulate some type of joint event.

Senator Rizal: It’d be a source of excitement.

Senator Edwards: With this event, it could demonstrate to the students we’re trying to connect with them.

Senator Raber: I’m imagining a ton of chairs on Battell beach and a buzzer and then someone yelling out “Change!”

Senator Edwards: I was thinking of maybe a dinner at Ross. Does anyone have any others also?

Senator Raber: How would we do that, because I feel like it’s hard to market. Would we need an incentive?

Senator Edwards: We wouldn’t want it to be serious—it’d be sarcastic.

Senator Singh: We did something similar last year in Hadley. Whoever participates would have to find a date for the person they were assigned to. It’s really fun and you can just hang out with each other.
Senator Han: Wasn’t the Senior Committee thinking of doing something similar? If we could make it fall on some type of event, it’d be great.

Senator Rizal: If we make it twice overall and with two weeks in between, we can see how people react. I can’t imagine 2,000 people pouring into Ross. It would test how people respond to it.

Senator Rizal: Maybe we could have a crush list that’s not just for seniors.

President Gratch: Who is interested in moving forward with this idea?

Senator Sohn: I think it’s really similar to events commons host like “Stew Your Hallmate.”

Senator Rizal: I think it’d be great if we move away from the commons and have SGA-related events.

President Gratch: When would we want to talk about this idea again?

Senator Edwards: We should talk about this again in two weeks.

Senator Schulman: What is your goal? When do you want this to happen?

Senator Edwards: I don’t know if we should wait till Valentine’s Day because it may be too cheesy.

Senator Schulman: If we could find a time after a weekend of midterms, I think a lot of people would show interest.

Deputy Chief of Staff Murphy: Maybe we can have a party after.

Speaker Gogineni: Maybe we can have a SGA Mask Ball. It’s something we could think about for the future, because it is out of our budget this year.

President Gratch: Thank you all. Now, we are going to discuss about the Residential Life Committee. It is a subset of Community Council and we need people to be on the committee. One of the freshman senators would need to sit on the board.

Advisor Adams: The Residential Life Committee is made up of students, faculty, and staff. The main topic we discuss is housing assignments and this year we are reviewing academic and special interest houses. It’s a great place for students to connect with staff members on campus. There are usually monthly meetings.
Senator Rainey: I think Senator Parikh and I would like to switch off semesters, but maybe we can talk about it more.

Advisor Adams: I can send out an email and we can discuss about this further.

President Gratch: We also thought we would put one more SGA member onto the committee because there seem to be of high interest on this topic. Does anyone want to be part of this committee?

Senator Schulman volunteers.

President Gratch: During my meeting with President Patton, we talked about the video we showed from last week. She gave sentiment about diversity and will take this year as the year to listen and make changes. She expressed her sentiment about wanting diversity on campus, and asked if we had any recommendations to improve Middlebury.

President Gratch: We also discussed about having more traditions on campus. We currently don't have any traditions that everyone seems to get excited about. Many faculties are also on board with this idea. We would host a school-wide competition where students submit ideas and a group of representative students, faculty, staff, and alumni would judge these ideas and then make it happen. I have to recommend these students to President Patton. We have one person to nominate and I’m asking whether you can give me the names of people who you think would be fitting for this role. We would also talk to the Traditions Committee with MCAB.

Senator Boyle: Will this impact the academic calendar? I've met students from other schools who don’t attend classes during these types of school days.

Co-chair Chang: Katy Smith Abbott has spoken about wanting to have class canceled during Winter Carnival. She also mentioned having “Mountain Days” where we wouldn’t have class.

Speaker Gogineni: I think we should reach out to the Commons Council.

Senator Raber: We could also reach out to a sports team captain. It would get many people involved, though it may draw on only a specific demographic.

Senator Han: I’ve spoken with a 1994 alumnus who said there were a lot of naked traditions back then. Maybe we can reach out to alumni or even the trustees.
President Gratch: They also talked about reinstating old traditions.

President Brady: I can also look into Special Collections for reference.

Senator Rainey: Maybe another mascot.

President Gratch: Does anyone else have any ideas?

Senator Singh: This is just a thought, but in order to make people feel more comfortable, should we house freshman with others who are socioeconomically different from them?

President Gratch: We can talk about this more in new business.

Gratch: I was recently looking in the old SGA files and found these comprehensive reports. I think we can recreate something like that and do some research on it to understand student stress. I see it to be very multi-faceted. The Directors of Health and Wellness are here to update us also.

Director of Health and Wellness Erwin: We’re currently hosting dinners with strangers – Wellness Edition—this semester to get a better sense of what health and wellness means to different populations on campus and learn what people are experiencing, struggling with. We are also brainstorming ideas on how to make this campus happier and healthier. We’ve had two dinners so far and both were extremely successful! “Stress Olympics” is everyone’s favorite topic, but there are a lot of other types of stress underneath the overlay of academic stress; students are often unaware of resources on campus, or find them inaccessible. There is also a desire to connect more with faculty and professional working adults on campus in more meaningful ways.

Director of Health and Wellness Copulsky: We’re also working with Barbara McCall and Baishakhi Taylor to create a poster by the end of the semester that can display a menu of health and wellness resources that are available on campus. We are also trying to encourage students to set down the books and stop the Stress Olympics by having brief intervals of positive engagement with their peers. We have partnered up with YAM to bring board games to dining halls, and plan on co-sponsoring events. We’re in the brainstorming phase for a campaign to encourage more meaningful faculty-student relationships. Besides Barbara McCall and YAM, we’re working with Kyra Grant and some other students to start sexual respect / education / respect workshops for J-term.
Allis: How do you select the ten people for the meetings?

Director of Health and Wellness Copulsky: They’re very random. We start out with people who we know and some seniors—especially those who we do not really hear from. We’ve been going off on that list and by people they recommend.

Senator Boyle: I was curious if you have researched about self-imposed stress? Because of the high achieving students at Midd, some students think that failing one test is the end of the world.

Director of Health and Wellness Erwin: We think of stress like a ball of yarn with many colors. School stress is just one color. It’s different for many people. At a high achieving place like Middlebury, academic stress is not the only type of stress.

Senator Rainey: I went to talk to my Professor recently and she told me there is a focus on bringing the grades than the learning and it disrupts what liberal arts mean. If we could put out some initiative with faculty and staff to make sure that when they’re talking about the syllabus, that students know that the grades are not what they are here for. What they’re learning is what they can apply outside.

Senator Raber: In terms of the dinners, I think it’s best if we have a lottery system.

Director of Health and Wellness Erwin: As of right now, we are going with recommendations from people who have attended the dinners, because it helps facilitate the conversations.

Speaker Gogineni: In terms of accessibility of counseling at Parton, are there discussions about having Parton open later at night?

Director of Health and Wellness Copulsky: They have recently made a part time counselor to full time and they recently gained approval to have two more counselors. They’re very aware that increasing staff is necessary. I think these new positions would be super helpful for the student body.

Co-chair Chang: My comment echoes that of Senator Raber’s but I think we’re missing huge groups of students on campus. You could easily Google a random generator. This way, it is random and fair.
Director of Health and Wellness Copulsky: I just want to mention that the self-imposed stress culture is up to us to change. Don’t start a conversation about how much work you have. Talk about what you’ve learned in a class or what you found interesting in the paper you wrote. We can create a shift just within here.

Co-chair Chang: I have one more announcement before we should move on to old and business. Community Council is up and running. We meet once a week and everyone is welcomed to attend. They are on Monday at 4:30 pm in the Crest Room.

IV. Old Business

No old business.

V. New Business
Larson Lovdal: The Ian Burgin Memorial Cabin is built in memory of Ian, who was a student here in 2010 but passed away due to a car accident. He loved the outdoors and the craftsmanship of building. His mom came up with the idea of building a cabin on top of the Snow Bowl, but will be on the Rikert trail. The Burgin Lodge will be a four-sided backcountry shelter at the base of Firetower Hill on the Rikert trail system. This multi-use space will act as an overnight destination for Mountain Club, Middview (first-year orientation), and FOO (Feb orientation) trips; a reservation-based getaway for students, faculty, staff, parents, and alumni; a retreat site for Middlebury organizations with interest in the outdoors; and an open warming hut for Rikert skiers. At the very least, hundreds of users are projected to use this structure every year. The Burgin Lodge will be a four-season shelter that welcomes members of the Middlebury community and appeals to a wide range of outdoor-experience levels from the complete novice to the highly experienced.

We have been planning and have sought funding from the SGA. The total budget is $100,000 and we have raised $65,000. We would like to have full funding before we start the project. We have all the permits, including both local and state level. It took about 7.5 months. The permits are in hand, and I will be going tomorrow to the site. We would have to put the foundation system in early November. It’s a very vernacular structure that’s meant to look like a cabin in the wood. All the material is very durable. Anyone with a Middlebury ID number can get a reservation. We may charge a reservations fee to hold people accountable. The money would go towards maintenance.

Senator Raber: If you don’t get funding from FFI, what would you do?

Larson: Ian’s family and friends, Kickstarter, and generous donors. We don’t have a concrete plan yet, but I truly believe it will happen.
Chief of Staff Brady: Do you have a committee behind you in the event this
doesn't work out this year?

Larson: I'll be back in the fall and if for some reason we still can't get
funding, I'll pass it down to someone.

Treasurer de Toledo: The way it works is that we have this $40,000 tied
up. The best case is to get the funding and start. When do we know that
we can pull the plug?

Larson: Ultimately, it's your money and you could pull the plug when you
want to. I don't want to scrap it as long as I'm here. I believe the funding is
there. If we really struggle to find it in the next two years, it is then that
maybe we should really consider canceling the project.

Chief of Staff Brady: Has the FFI given you an amount of money? Or do
you know the limit?

Larson: I don't know the exact amount but it can range from a few
thousand, to how much it takes to have a faculty member teach at a local
prison. They never gave me an amount.

Senator Allis: It sounds like you're proceeding the project without 100%,
so I assume the $40,000 will get returned if the project collapses?

Larson: It's being held until we're fully funded.

President Gratch: It's my understanding that when the SGA voted last
year for this project, it had some different ideas. There was no mention of
heating system.

Larson: There have been concerns about funding coming through so we
came in with a secondary plan to cut the cost down. In terms of the
winterization of the cabin, it would be a decision we would go with if all
the necessary funding came in. Maybe we could decrease the scope of the
current project. We're definitely still moving for full funding but when
spring comes alone and we are still missing the $35,000, we could build
along this scaled down contingency.

Speaker Gogineni: Would you be open to the idea that we set a deadline
for this year for you to get full funding? If you don't get the money by
then, perhaps it would go back into our budget and you could ask for a
new budget in the spring.
Larson: Again it's your money and I see how that makes sense on the financial side of things. February seems like a good decision. It wouldn't be good to build the site during the muddy season.

President Gratch: When would you be able to build?

Larson: We're thinking around summer. It would be about a month and we would have a general contractor. The real focus is to create the end space for future students. We don't want to take the route of being built by mostly students, but we would like to include students every other step along the way.

Speaker Gogineni: Thank you for coming in.

Speaker Gogineni: Any more new businesses?

Senator Singh: Just the idea about housing.

Senator Allis: I think it's a great idea, but I'm worried that it would create the notion of having a "rich kid and poor kid" scenario.

Senator Bhkata: I think the hall is where we should be mixing, not the rooms.

Senator Singh: The thing about the hall is that it's easy to just close your door. The reason why I came up with this idea is because I've seen roommates that are very different and after living together, they realized that they had more in common than they had thought.

Senator Rizal: That's very great, but I have counter examples where two people hated each other. We should do a big survey to see what others think.

Senator Boyle: I think matching by habits actually create diverse housing. Habits hold no bounds.

Senator Parikh: I'm afraid with this proposal that people of lower socioeconomic class would feel that they're here because it's for someone with their opposite socioeconomic background. They're at Middlebury just to say they have lived with someone of lower socio-economic class. I think what Senator Boyle was getting at about habits actually might make very effective pairings.

Senator Rainey: I like what the aim is, but I just want to say that these types of things are already happening in different activities. These civil societies of not interacting with people they wouldn't have back at home.
I don’t think it’s necessary to put in a room. If you’re in a club or any type of activity, it’s inevitable to share these experiences. I don’t necessarily think matching people in a room is the best thing to do.

Senator Han: I think the Commons coordinators are great resources to talk about what’s been successful and what’s been unsuccessful.

Senator Chen: Commons coordinators are the ones to go to. What i’ve seen that is very successful is by having dinners with strangers. Pick people they would like to get to know. It’s very easy to not talk to someone, but it’s also very easy to talk to someone when you’re on the same hall.

Senator Rizal: If you're interested in this, you can do a natural experiment. Get the data about roommates from the coordinators or those who are in charge of housing, and see who these students choose to live with during their sophomore, junior and senior years. See whether living with someone from a different socioeconomic class would draw them to live with people the year after.

Speaker Gogineni: I think having a questionnaire would be great, because you're not forced to live with a student of a different socioeconomic class if you don't want to.

Chief of Brady: Due to time constraints, I will be shifting gears. I would like to have each of you tell me what you've been doing. Each will have 10 seconds to update to everyone what you've done and accomplished.

Senator Raber: I've sent out biweekly emails to the seniors of what we've been doing.

Senator Schulman: I went to the dinner they mentioned, and as an insider, I think it was very diverse.

Senator Rizal: Not much I did, but besides talking and updating people of what we’ve been doing. I brought to the meeting the positive and negative things that they have shared with me.

Senator Sohn: Been mainly working with the CCI about having sophomore event. I met with them last week and I’m also on the ad hoc committee and we're meeting with her again.

Senator Boyle: Emailed Erin Quinn, the Director of Athletics. I have also been looking into the party culture at Middlebury and seeing what the social life is like without being part of an activity or group or sport.
Senator Rainey: I’m also part of the ad hoc committee. During the 50th year environment leadership celebration, I had a brief conversation about diversity with President Patton. Senator Parikh and I have been discussing about the freshman committee and how to go about with that.

Senator Parikh: I have been having conversations with students about diversity and race on campus.

Senator von Platen: Starting a column on middbeats and speaking to fellow students on improvements that could be made on campus.

Senator Allis: Pub safe meeting and will be bringing in a bill next week. Turning part of E lot into student parking.

Senator Bhakta: I have been speaking to other students on improvements, having late night goods and food truck, and security cameras.

Senator Singh: I have been trying to have people in my commons to interact with me. I use this opportunity to hear their ideas and think of ways to improve.

Senator Chen: I have been working with a few others on campus to hopefully bring a printer to Ross.

Senator Edwards: Planning Cook commons events like a red carpet event. Also talking to the CCI about having events after 6:30 pm.

Co-chair Chang: Sent out two surveys, one student body email, had meeting(s) with Katy Smith Abbot, and sent out/ responded to more emails.

Speaker Gogineni: I have been drafting a email to the Dean of Faculty about having longer comprehensive curriculum descriptions when choosing classes.

Senator Brady: Great work, everyone. Continue talking and working, and it would be in our interest to have results by the end of the first semester. If you are submitting a bill, they need to be submitted before Thursday.

Senator Rizal: How many of you know about Open Container Laws? Had I known I wouldn’t have gotten a citation. It made me realize that we can get a citation for a lot of things. But I’m saying if we can get a page about what Open Container is, how we should be drinking, how public safety is actually trying to help, then students can learn and won’t get in trouble.
Co-chair Chang: That is something Community Council is very interested in, so please reach out Senator Rizal.

VI. Adjournment

    Senator Bhakta: Motion to adjourn
    Senator Boyle: Seconded

    Meeting adjourned.

    Time of adjournment: 8:25 PM.