General Assembly Meeting: April 7, 2013

Agenda:
Opening of the Meeting: Meeting called to order at 7:00pm

1. Fight song and role call
2. Role of RA’s Discussion
   a. Kate Cullen: For some context: There are a lot of things that RAs can do better from what I’ve heard and this is why I ran for WSA. On SAC we reached out to other schools to see how their RA system works, talked to students, talked to URLC, held forums with RAs, and admin in ResLife. We have compiled some ideas on what we think is wrong and what can be improved in this system. We want from this discussion to get a better sense and what should our priorities be moving forward, and what certain tangible solutions could be pursued. Just to gather ideas and to move forward before the end of the semester.
   b. Nicole Updegrove: To elaborate, we are looking to give ResLife a proposal to improve policies and procedures. There are things that both students and student staff don’t love about their jobs. We are looking for ways to better improve community building and mentorship in halls.
   c. Jason Shatz: I had a good experience with my RA. Good resource. My hallway was also good. The question is: should there be a balance between individual mentorship and the community building role of the RA? Are there other priorities?
   d. Christian Hosam: To Kate and Nicole, in your reaching out to people, what were your priorities you were looking for then v. now?
      i. Kate Cullen: At first, it was for general suggestions, now it is to confirm what may be universally true for the student body. I want to hear your suggestions, not just mine.
   e. Martin Malabanan: What is the average student to RA ratio?
      i. Kate Cullen: It varies.
   f. Andrew Trexler: Can Gideon and Eric talk about your meetings with RAs?
   g. Gideon: Head Resident for Foss. Andrew talking about our weekly RA staff meetings. We talk to them to really touch base with them, to communicate with them. RA do duty, helps them to have consistency on what they do. Monthly I have one on one meeting with RAs and see how their programming is going, etc. I’m like a supervisor to RAs.
h. Eric: Head Resident for program houses. Full staff meetings every other week, talking about programming they do in their houses. On weeks without full staff meetings, we also have individual one on one meetings to talk about how the community is working, how the house manager thinks things are working.

i. Ola: RA on Clark 2, last year HM. My experience in ResLife has been quite the experience. There is a lot of pressure and work to do, a lot we have to do as ResLife staff that goes unseen. Specifically with support, health issues, it is a lot of work. There are times I have considered not continuing this job.

j. Arya: Over my four years here, the few RAs that get a bad reputation for their conduct is not only a poor reflection of ResLife, but also bad impact to other RAs. How these “bad apples” affect the rest of the staff. “Power tripping” is something I’ve heard about, some RAs have become to take the job of patrolling—that mentality creates a bad impression of RAs, but it is also inappropriate for students to take on that role. That small difference from student and on ResLife staff is big.

  i. Christian Hosam: Do you think that it is some RAs want to power trip, or is it a pressure from above? That’s a different problem

  ii. Arya: It’s both. When some on staff achieve “tangible” results (writing people up) they get praised and rewarded from higher up. There is pressure from non-student staff to produce paperwork.

k. Gideon: In response, being someone to incentivize people to do duty, there is no one on staff who wants to go on rounds. The motivation isn’t to bust, we know it’s that we have to address things and be consistent now, or else things can devolve very quickly. There is a back and forth between ResLife and student body in pushing the boundaries. We congratulate them for facing these difficult calls. The reward system is less based on doing a good job but for a tough job. We need to stay consistent in maintaining consistency. There are a lot of people in the community who feel uncomfortable who may not speak up against those who use substances. We preempt by doing duty. These regulations aren’t too hard to overcome. We cannot enter rooms as RAs. As long as you’re not disturbing the community, we don’t bust it up.

l. Lily Herman: I have had the experience where there is loud music being played, a RA knocked on the door, and the RA said she needed to search the room, even though she doesn’t have that jurisdiction. I’ve heard similar stories. That is where some animosity come from.

m. Arya: What I’m getting at is that there should be less incentive or need for RAs to produce an amount of paperwork to be seen as a “good” RA. RAs in the past have told me that they’ve been told that they didn’t write up enough people in a period of time. There is that pressure from higher up to have people written up. When someone brings their own personal convictions into their role as a RA, bringing up questions of morality or God is ridiculous. That is just an example of giving
one student a little more power to be problematic.

n. Grant Tanenbaum: I’m curious from ResLife staff that if you weren’t as this power to write students up, would you be more effective in your other roles as a RA to have students come to you if they won’t get in trouble judicially?

o. Ola: It’s really a difference in a way you view a RA. I’ve had people come to me with issues because of the ways I’ve set the atmosphere from the start. It’s a learning experience. Some students do don’t go to their RAs because they are afraid it would be reported.

   i. Grant Tanenbaum: Would it be better if students were less afraid of being caught? Would there be less high risk drinking and less transports if students were less afraid of being caught?

   ii. Gideon: I would say no. When people drink and go to the hospital, they’re already drinking to get drunk.

   iii. Ola: There is that policy of not facing sanction the first time you get medical transport.

   iv. Chloe: Does the person who reports someone needing transport also get so called immunity?

   v. Eric: Yes they do.

   vi. Andrew Trexler: That is not true across the board. For Gideon, you say its true that those transported have immunity? I’m not sure that is true.

   vii. Gideon: The direction given to ResLife is to focus and make sure the person needing transported is okay.

   viii. Andrew Trexler: I think this immunity needs to be the standard across the board, not true right now.

p. Mary Diaz: I was an HM last year, having to write someone up is uncomfortable in confrontation. More effective would be unless it requires transport, the people doing writing up should be those higher up and not necessarily the RAs themselves.

q. Nicole Updegrove: Just to redirect a little, I understand the need of community standards and maintaining them. But write ups last semester more than doubled than in fall semester of 2011. It’s alarming because students are feeling it and it’s affecting their experience here - which would be fine if we were seeing changes in student behavior, but we aren’t. I’m curious about the ways how we may change how enforcement works. We have a lot of halls that are disconnected and no community really exists—what can we do for those halls? Is there something different needed in policy or programming?

r. Jacob Musinsky: I’ve had good experiences with RAs because they have treated me as a friend and supported and less of a leader figure. I wouldn’t feel uncomfortable going to my RA. They need to be a friend and guidance role, and in the case of emergency to come in. One RA of another hall has come to my hall
to patrol.

s. Sam Ebb: The motivation and the way RAs get across to students to really make them come together makes a difference. In-person engagement instead of just email. We need someone there not just be to write you up. The focus needs to be how to foster relationship with the RAs. We need to focus on working with rather than working against.

t. Jesse: Two things, about HMs then RAs. For HMs, they aren’t required to do rounds, but still held to the same standards, some HMs are afraid of being caught at a party and be fired for example, even without drinking. They have a cumbersome amount of paperwork they are subjected to. For places like Westco or 200 Church, where people have to apply to get in, ResLife doesn’t respect that community people want to live in, they have placed people who didn’t want to be there or foster that community in these places. Bad relationship between people and the RAs in those halls.

u. Eric: In response, there is no space that has autonomy to ResLife. That probably won’t be changing.

i. Jesse: If there aren’t enough people who want to live in Westco as RAs, they should be asked. There shouldn’t be RAs who don’t want to live in Westco.

ii. Chase: I’m an example of that. I want to live in Westco, but they won’t let me, I know of people who don’t want to live in Westco as RAs but are placed there.

v. Gideon: There is a substance abuse problem in Westco. More in Westco than in other areas. The Westco community needs to shift and change from this problem before meaningful dialogue about placing people who want to be there.

w. Jesse: I lived in Westco for two years and I disagree, that isn’t a response to really be what I wanted to point out. There needs to be a better relationship between RAs and their residents.

x. Mari Jarris: Selection process for RAs in Westco and 200 Church should be more like with program houses. When people drink to get drunk, they definitely don’t drink to go to the hospital. Communicating the boundaries and how to avoid that could be more emphasized.

y. Sam Ebb: There is this assumption that there are so many people who would drink to get drunk. There needs to be candid conversations between RAs and students in their halls, saying that there are different ways to do things. Emphasize safety.

i. Gideon: Valid point but there is difficulty to have students counsel their peers. Difficult to give someone as peers to have this conversation.

ii. Sam Ebb: It’s one thing to officially give counsel, but another to tell someone that something is really dumb because you know that much, regardless of “expertise.”
z. Adam: It shouldn’t be peers writing up fellow peers, maybe. Williams system is more residential, less judicial like ours. The way we have it now isn’t the only way to do things, there are ways to change them.

aa. Kate Cullen: Williams system: there is less hierarchy in their system, more equal as peers. Issues of consistency and transparency among the stories I’ve been hearing that influences community. Transparency: what does your RA even really supposed to do? Residents should know all the things that their RA needs to do. Programming requirements?

bb. Christian Hosam: I agree that university shouldn’t endorse RA to resident counseling.

c. Eric: There is a guide for RAs to help their residents direct and guide their residents.

d. Jason: POI: The WSA talked about stress and its main sources on campus last week.

e. Zach: I think another extension of Wesleyan’s biggest problem is that some RAs are very invested in their work, while others were not very invested and interested in creating personal, individual conversations. I don’t think the issue is programming vs. non-programming, I think it’s that it’s difficult to hold non-invested RAs accountable.

ff. Lily H: I’ve had an RA who has expressed that they signed up for the job for the money. Sometimes you have RAs that are incentivized by payment, which then causes problems in their communities.

g. Jason: In dealing with these issues of hierarchy, it might be easier to promote communities in freshmen halls and program houses. In the long run, programming can be seen as a way to establish community values and standards. If Wesleyan prides itself on not being a bubble, programming should be used for outreach as well as bonding.

hh. Chase: Regarding the WestCo point, me expressing my interest in being an RA doesn’t make me less qualified to be an RA. I think one solution is to allow for RAs to choose what environment that they will live in, so that they are more likely to connect with their community and understand their residential areas.

ii. Alton: Regarding sense of community, students are placed randomly into halls, namely as freshman, and thus it may be more difficult to create a stronger sense of community because there may not be as much of a connecting factor.

jj. Christian: I think we could create more of a “sweeping” program housing application. Also, I think that some of the problems with community that RAs are running into are schoolwide problems, rather than problems stemming from the RA system.

kk. Eric: As a house manager, programs are very easy to word in such a way that will fulfill certain requirements. I think that some of the forms are so lengthy that
students won’t spend as much time on it. Also, a lot of the forms that RAs fill out are opportunities for RAs to compliment themselves. No broader concept of accountability exists.

II. Nicole Updegrove: Getting at the community issue—Alton had a good point. Random placement into freshman dorms - is that good? Would fragmentation by putting students with others who share same interests together good for community in a hall? How can we build the respect between residents in a hall? Seemingly, programming isn’t working.

mm. Sam Ebb: Some of this conversation seems to be split into dichotomies. These are baseline of community standards that should be more in place between residents as well. We need to foster community with ResLife. Working with, not against.

nn. Mary Diaz: With program evaluation form, maybe get the residents to also provide input.

oo. Gideon: Probably great to give residents that option. When I did programs as a HM, people just don’t really show up. The way we are currently programming isn’t helping. WSA can help by pushing for in-hall programming, not outside.

pp. Sisi Metiva: Isn’t ResLife already pushing for in-hall programming?

qq. Nicole Brenner: With program evaluations, is there a reference where current RAs can see what programs were successful or not in the past?

   i. Eric: There isn’t a big thing, but for HM there is a folder of events that we held that may stay within a house (for program houses).

   ii. Nicole: Share these things with other HMs and RAs.

rr. Christian Hosam: Touching on what Alton said, the method of randomization in freshman dorm placement is not good. Maybe a survey or questions about interest can help gauge how a hall may turn out.

   i. Chloe Murtagh: I do hear that this randomization is weird all the time, but I had a good experience with this.

ss. Sisi: I agree with Chloe. I’m RA of Writing Hall, my residents are too cliquey. It’s funny that you can get credit for a program where even one person shows up—maybe establish a minimum for a program to count.

tt. Jacob Musinsky: Echoing the randomization comment, my hall didn’t mesh at all. For sophomore housing programming, much of it is pointless. What is the point of the current programming for sophomores?

uu. Gideon: As it stands, it is very tough to find the programming residents who want to go to. I haven’t seen a formula to get residents to come. In Hewitt, we’ve emphasized in-hall programming.

vv. Arya: Commenting on what has been said, is there a way so RAs don’t have to programming? And that money can go somewhere else? Making it clear to residents, also, that they can suggest ideas to their RAs.
Ellen: Couple points—on the randomization point, a study done showed little to no correlation between people getting along by being placed based on surveys. Programs are too complicated. The simplest ones that my RA puts on are the most successful. Combine programs with info sessions?

Nicole Updegrove: What does the staff want us to work on and changed?
   i. Gideon: I don’t think budget cutting would hurt too much. Most people don’t go to programs. On enforcement, an RA and HM can be more effective maybe without the oversight, but something would have to replace that.
   ii. Eric: As an HR, there is no good substantive way to judge how people are developing their communities. Problematic things such as programming is because it tries to be a substitute for community building. It’s not a simple solution while still maintaining accountability.

Mary Diaz: Are CAs required to do programs?
   i. Yes.

Christian Hosam: Communication as the underlying problem—has ResLife been thinking about this?
   i. Eric: Yes we have.
   a. Gideon: Having a minimum in programming is good.

3. Open Forum
   a. Jacob: Ice cream vending machine downstairs Usdan is no longer there.

4. Chalking Resolution
   a. Scott Elias: The more I’ve thought about this, I don’t agree with the chalking ban, cost 12,000 dollars to maintain this ban. There is an argument that this ban is illegal.
   b. Eric: There is a CT law that says an employer to prevent someone from 1st Amendment rights? I’ve met with administrators—many of them think that it’s fine. In conversation, some have said that this is a necessary evil, and that if we can address certain concerns, they would lift the ban. Couple specific requests, such as hate speech, and a way for PSafe to monitor things. The solution is really unsolvable for these things. If you can’t move these mountains, we can make the argument that this isn’t the substance of the issue. First issue on hate or negative speech from chalking—the issue is compounded by the anonymity of the medium. This is the wrong way to go, works against social justice. Broader conversation with groups on campus if the ban works against social justice. The Holi incident showed that there was a pocket of oppression in our society that we don’t talk about or address in campus. The administration seems to be starting to deal with the underlying problems. Sweeping oppression under the rug by pointing to “bad eggs” is not good for social justice. Need to address the underlying problems that exist. A broader conversation with the campus community is needed, to see
if the chalking ban really works against. With enforcement and PSafe not being the “God from above that can observe everything,” why are people having such a difficult time with making a decision? We need to stop catering to that. It is also true we need to develop community standards. We need to recognize that hate speech or violent graphic images won’t be permitted on our campus. On the pervasiveness of the speech—ten years ago, that community that was pervasive is not the same community today. Technology wasn’t the same as it is today. There is a lot of ways that we, as a community, can address our civil responsibilities. Admin is building unmovable mountains for us to seemingly deal with.

c. Arya: One profound argument for banning is for the “beauty of campus.” When you start defacing the entire sides of buildings, having inappropriate things up, it goes too far. Some stuff written is too much, and those things are hostile. It’s disconcerting to have to face the defacing of property on campus. Chalking should be a right fundamentally, but many people can’t be responsible.

d. Scott Elias: Want versus right needs to be clarified. There should be a consistent communication policy, where if people feel threatened by something, it can be looked at—not an all across ban. It’s symbolic pushing the administration with this resolution.

e. Jesse: To my knowledge, chalking on the side of buildings won’t be supported, that is still vandalism. We want chalking on pathways. The admin in defending this policy is an issue. The way the policy exists now, they can enforce it in a way we suggested them to. They contract someone to wash all chalking away without any discretion on how that affects campus. No one is saying that the speech is problematic. A blanking ban is counterproductive.

f. Scott: The resolution only focuses on chalking on pathways.

g. Christian: For this resolution, to consider: The administration isn’t really communicating with us on this. We can push for faculty and alumni to get involved. This conversation can also be centered about how other ways that can be triggering or oppressing. Why is banning chalking so unique and not other mediums? You are perpetuating the problem with banning it. It adds another layer of oppression, adds to another level of oppression on campus.

h. Jason Shatz: I want to be sure that this resolution won’t allow chalking on walls, buildings. It may be implied, but maybe more explicit.

i. Arya: I wanted to point to was chalking in general, not just on buildings but also on sidewalks and how defacing may happen. I’ve advocated is for having particular areas of campus that are okay for chalking, such as at Northwestern.

j. Christian: I disagree with the notion of “zones” because it goes against the idea of being free (to chalk). Constraining chalking may be going against the point of it. We are all offended in our daily lives, but is that enough reason to take away free speech?
k. Glenn Cantave: I disagree with everything Christian just said. Having an area
dedicated to chalking. Words have power, aesthetics of campus is important. I’m
an advocate for saying what you have to say.
l. Nicki Softness: We cannot hide what Wesleyan is from prospective students.
m. Jacob Musinsky: There are a lot of people who may be drawn to Wesleyan
because of chalking.
n. Glenn Cantave: I meant in terms of the obscene remarks.
o. Andrew Trexler: I hear what you say, Glenn, but it is not correct in the way in
trying to ban oppression by limiting speech.
p. Nicole Updegrove: About Admissions, not everyone is like you. A lot of people
might be affected by commentary in different ways - and what I may see on a
Tour could really affect my decision on coming to Wesleyan. We are here to be
challenged in what we think—but not everyone is here for that reason (namely
staff). We have freedoms to do things, but others also have the freedom from
harassment, obscenity, etc. I will be taking around a pledge for standards, which
won’t solve everything but is a step.
q. Nicole Brenner: An interesting compromise may be to start with specific chalking
zones, and be like a trial period, then perhaps expand.
r. Kate Cullen: Does the campus sentiment when chalking was serious still exist
today? There may be people who want to put up offensive statements, but is that
culture truly exists if we haven’t seen it in other mediums?
s. Mari Jarris: The admin framing this in the wrong way, maybe having a petition
that we won’t engage in that or having zones is setting us up to fail. We should
focus on how to reframe this in a different way.
t. Arya: Back to the notion of hiding what the real Wesleyan is, the characteristic
of chalking versus flyering—chalking seems to be a lot more anonymous. You
find more offensive things from chalk than poster. We don’t want one message
giving people the wrong idea of what Wesleyan is. It’s not the majority you have
to worry about—it’s the minority that makes it hard.
u. Jason: Chalking may not be entirely anonymous, handwriting. On the legal
train of thought, is chalking speech or conduct? Is defacing property speech or
conduct? On hate speech, Supreme Court has made decisions what is offensive
or not. Vulgarity is quite subjective. We need to trust people know what the
standards are.
v. Andrew Trexler: Off of my last point, yes, people can write offensive things and
that is bad, but if I had some particular opinion about something that offends
people, I’m not going to lose that opinion just because I don’t have the capability
to chalk it. The solution is not to limit or remove speech, but to have more speech
and more conversation, to enable the people who are offended to respond and
work towards conclusions. The solution to trolling isn’t to prevent all from speech. I am very much in favor of enabling people to have more conversation.

w. Mary Diaz: While I may feel offended, there is some value in seeing these things and to see what the problems are on campus.

x. Christian Hosam: *Quoting from an Argus piece etc...*

y. Jacob: Chalking can also be used for art.

z. Andrew Trexler: On Admissions, complaining about the university at Admissions pushes admin to look at the issue.

aa. Christian: It’s important to recognize that the chalking ban is just a cover other problems that are deeper on campus that we are not addressing.

bb. Arya: The point I’m getting at with that is that chalking can enable to say whatever they want. Why is it less accountable than flyering or other publication? My issue isn’t so much as to giving people to an off idea, but to turn people away directly. It gives a small population to define themselves without accountability.

cc. Christian Hosam: But is seeing that one thing may not be the sole reason they would be turned away from Wesleyan. The chalking ban is just unsustainable.

dd. Arya: A concrete example: With the Diversity University forum, it coincided with the SOC weekend—students said that they thought Wesleyan was a racist institution. They left campus thinking Wesleyan is racist which we are not.

ee. Andrew Trexler: I don’t think that would have happened if the university gave people a way to address problems. Problems from chalking may increase under chalking ban. I believe that in a situation without chalking prohibition, those messages that are of the minority will be drowned out.

ff. Christian: Not all of those prefrosh had a negative experience.

gg. Nicki: It’s impossible to prevent people from seeing the negative aspects of Wesleyan, namely the internet. Imposing a different standard on chalking is problematic.

hh. Ellen Paik: Main counter argument against this resolution is contributing to negativity on campus or people on tours. Chalking makes apparent conversations that needs to happen. A minority voice may have less of a stay with the majority. On people touring campus, if people are going to judge Wesleyan from one piece of chalk, are they fit for Wesleyan’s challenging environment?

ii. Eric: Seeing something from chalk can enable a conversation about that very problem, a concrete example of something that can be discussed. A blanket ban prevents people from actually reporting these instances of hate, no assumptions that someone else is taking care of it.

jj. Arya: Good point. There are other places where these sentiments can be expressed. Fairly certain that things are brought up from chalking you can also find somewhere else on campus. Chalking is different from other forms of expression on campus is because it just is so anonymous. I don’t think that it is
apart of my duty as a Wesleyan student to counter all the things I see wrong.

kk. Nicole Brenner: One thing chalking does really well is that you don’t have to go out of your way to be finding contrasting points of view. Look at the basement of the UOC.

ll. Jacob Musinsky: Most people I’ve talked to wants to have chalking.

mm. Andrew Trexler: I don’t think it is the duty or responsibility of anyone to make or respond to particular speech but it is our right.

nn. Sam Ebb: We haven’t touched on the other aspects, such as hostile work environment, such as personally defamatory comments.
   i. Andrew Trexler: Those opinions are harbored anyways, need to address them.
   ii. Jesse: Those comments would still be removed.

oo. Glenn Cantave: Chalking may be a great way to express campus sentiments, but there are other ways to also express your own sentiments. But the difference between chalking and other mediums is that I cannot truly avoid it. I’m more in favor of zones. There will always be trolls.

pp. Christian Hosam: This seems to be a mild reason to prevent chalking. There are other ways to be anonymous. The ban doesn’t help the campus climate.

qq. Andrew Trexler: Before the ban, they tried limiting chalking, but it failed.

rr. Justin: On the reaction of prefrosh, on the “if they don’t like it, they shouldn’t be here” is very naive, we need to attract all different applicants.

ss. Glenn Cantave: I’m not against chalking, but how can we fix having some of the freedom?

tt. Scott Elias: There is something to be said that it is valuable for some applicants to come and see chalking. It is okay for messages for applicants to see. We need to uphold the idea that we have the ability to have free speech. There are concerns, but this resolution at least offers an alternative role in addressing those concerns. Most chalking since the ban is against the ban.

5. **Minutes from previous week approved.**

6. **Committee Reports**

7. **New Business and Announcements**
   a. Jacob: Buy Terp tickets!
   b. Christian Hosam: For conn review, I think we should move our meetings to Thursdays, because people have classes on Mondays. Put a set time on our meetings.
   c. Scott: Coming to a consensus on a time is important.

Meeting Adjourned: 10:25 pm
Respectfully Submitted,
Grant Tanenbaum ‘15, Ellen Paik ‘16, and Alton Wang ‘16