General Assembly Meeting: November 17, 2013

Keywords: diversity, CDO Antonio Farias, elections, points system, SJB discipline

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

1. Fight song and role call [fight song was off tempo]
2. Chief Diversity Officer Antonio Farias’ Visit
   a. **Chief Diversity Officer Antonio Farias joins us for this discussion. He is referred to in these minutes as “CDO Farias”**.
   b. CDO Farias: I think the CDO should be a catalyst. I’m here to do more listening than talking. That’s what I’ve said since I interviewed here. I didn’t come here with a specific vision or with best practices in mind. I’m here to listen more than anything and then formulate my vision from there. My door is always open. While I serve the President’s office, I also serve all students’ needs, no matter who in the community you are. Each student here is served by my office. Diversity doesn’t have one set definition. The Wesleyan pedigree follows you and other people will want your opinion and will begin to trust you. My office’s buzz words are ‘equity’ and ‘inclusion’, what we have to figure out is how to actualize those words. We also serve Title IX and I am its coordinator here. Again, Title IX serves every human being on this campus.
   c. Nicki Softness: What are some concrete ideas you have to ensure you get to know the student population?
   d. CDO Farias: One of the initial things is communicating with the WSA, which is the beginning. Then, there are other leadership groups and finally, those without a group, from whom I need to hear most. It’s all about getting a network in; my calendar is completely full. I spend time with a mix of students, staff, administration, and community members.
   e. Richard Fessler: Do you have a specific vision for Greeks? A specific role?
   f. CDO Farias: I don’t know much about the Greek system, but I know they have to be included in discussion. Inclusion has to be an integral part of our system. No community exists free of strife. The concept of inclusion sometimes causes friction. I don’t believe in dyadic relationships. My office can serve to get people together. My role isn’t to fix your problems like a nanny. My role is help you find the solutions for yourself.
   g. Mary Diaz: What is your relationship with admissions? Also, sexual assault is huge
h. CDO Farias: Part of my responsibility is working with admission to ensure diversification of students. We need more first generation students. There’s a dirty secret no one talks about-- the universities are skimming off the top. The students here would succeed no matter where they went. My role is to talk to the admissions deans.

I’m meeting again with the financial aid dean soon. As for sexual assault, I come from a place where the foot of Congress has been on our throat. Our numbers at the Coast Guard went up big time from 5 to 8%. Usually, committees are created and they try to figure out how to fix the problem, but that will solve them. No one gets up in the morning and is a sexual predator. It’s never a clear demarcation between what is right and what is wrong-- it has to do with education and cultural influences. I meet with the chaplains, the sexual assault resource center, and P-Safe-- the first responders on campus. My goal is to create something long-lasting, not just a temporary resource. We have to go from a we-fix-it to a you-fix-it mode of thinking about problems.

i. Alton Wang: How do plan on reaching out to students, not just visible leaders? Usually, voices go unheard and certain voices are louder than others.

j. CDO Farias: I want to get recommendations from the WSA or other students, because I don’t know. Students have busy schedules. It’s not always easy to meet with students. Even if students are willing, it’s hard to get to them. Sustainability is also a certain part of how I want to approach things. If it’s just a task force or an event, it’s not going to work. We have to deal with policy and it’s gonna be real work.

k. Sadasia McCutchen: Regarding the ‘Making Excellence Inclusive’ model, what changes would you make to it?

l. CDO Farias: The model is meant to include everyone, which is why it’s vague and foggy. It’s given as ground rules to determine how you move forward. Faculty members were told they’re going through ‘training’. Wrong word; we have to keep in mind that the approach in mind. Changing the name doesn’t help, it’s about changing the community’s focus. Everyone is willing to help now because we’re in the honeymoon phase. Gradually, people want to see action. I don’t want to be an arrogant administrator who just tells people what to do.

m. Nicki Softness: I think your opinions on sexual assault events are very relevant. How do you feel you can be a catalyst for getting others interested? And how do you think the administration involved.

n. CDO Farias: The first thing I want to push forward is clarity-- no many people know where to get a friend help if a sexual assault happens. There should also be an all-inclusive policy for everyone on campus. Then, there will be educational workshops on sexual assault focusing on different groups, like athletics or science, where the training will be specific to them. In that sense, there’ll be a lot of autonomy. The customization of how we approach this will happen at the microcosm level and then
build up.
o. Andrew Trexler: How long can you stick around? If anyone could talk about MEI, please get on stack.
p. CDO Farias: As long as you want me. How many of you were involved in MEI? [only a few raise hands] Ah, that’s very telling. I think it’s important if more people do their research.
q. Nicole Updegrove: An MEI sub-committee I was on, headed by the former CDO, made recommendations about to help disadvantaged students succeed - but few of them ever went into effect. Eventually, the sub-committee just dissolved. I’m not sure it ever accomplished anything.
r. Sadasia McCutchen: Where does Wes stand in terms of MEI? And how does the model currently facilitate it? What recommendations would you make to it?
s. CDO Farias: And that’s a big question. It’s tough. The first thing that’ll be created in a central committee that doesn’t just work on MEI-- there’s a broader climate culture called Wesleyan. I’ve asked Michael [Roth] to create a senior-enough committee that looks at the climate and culture at Wes at large. At Coast Guard, I created a committee that was full of people that were down with diversity. We identified problems, but few in the committee had the power to do anything about them. Version 3.0 was bringing mid-management to sit on climate committee that look at how people organize and diversify at Coast Guard. Those people would be able to turn knobs and get things fixed. We could talk any issue to death, but there’s always a clock. We need to bring the issue down to the grassroots and what is actionable. In terms of financial aid, it means getting the person in charge of it and sitting down with ze and talking about the long-term issue. The beauty of it is that the WSA has a lot of power, but only as a collective-- and the student body does as well. But the influence has to be strategic. It’s about having an honest, transparent conversation. We won’t fix sexual assault while we’re here. But we can come to a table and have an honest discussion about how we can tackle the issue. Transparency breeds self-correcting behaviors. My promise is that I’ll be transparent, but unfortunately, I won’t get to know everyone. My office is responsible for reporting out; we’ll use a scorecard. It’ll let us know whether we’re moving in the right direction, which helps us be more accountable. The scorecard-- a form of data-- will help hold us accountable as opposed to emotions, which can be temporary. You have to ask for the data-- that’s the biggest way to change.
t. Rebecca Hutman: How will you prioritize what to do first?
u. CDO Farias: There are many different things. The short-necessity is getting Title IX in place immediately and getting people trained. What I really need is the students’ help-- you know how the herd moves and how we’ll get compliance on this issue. The key thing is getting the Title IX office set up. There needs to be a bureaucracy put in place. Long-term is focused on Wesleyan 2020-- whether it’s MEI we take on or other
issues. We also need to address funding-- there’s money out there and I have a knack for finding it.

v. Jason Shatz: Have you observed contrarian opinions here?

w. CDO Farias: During this honeymoon phase, I’ve experienced little. In terms of the trans* bathroom issue, I’ve been listening to different opinions. I wasn’t here when it occurred, so I can’t speak much to it. We need to provide solutions-- if one just goes in with a complaint, it achieves nothing. As one makes demands, one also needs to provide solutions. It means that one is actually willing to be a part of the solution set-- one has to be ready to do something about it. One can’t be too busy if they really care about it.

x. Patrick Koegh: In terms of structures and broadening the range of people who care, how do you reach out to those people?

y. CDO Farias: I was there way back when, dealing with people who didn’t care about campus issues. The way you change people's opinions isn't by silencing them. What are the conceptual values of Wesleyan? We need to keep with those, but that doesn’t mean to be silent. I think the big thing is trying to understand the other side. There’s always another side to the story, and the perspective might change. The question is, is it possible that there’s something in this person’s background that makes them oppose policies? And that is reality. We don’t assess every little thing in the application process-- we just look to see if one has fit the general mold of our values. What comes next is identifying what one has a special interest in-- one always has an exchange value in things they choose to do. They get something out of it. I got my science faculty to move on the issue because I gave them something irrelevant. Generally, one feels obliged to give something back after being given something. Everyone has needs and have to be taken into account. Preaching doesn’t work anymore-- rewarding the faculty that improves diversity will receive a grant is something that works. We live in a zero sum world, there are only so many resources out there. Remember, we can’t create islands with these issues-- we have to be willing to get back into the ring and deal with these issues head on.

z. Glenn Catave: The minority retention rate is only 75% within six years. It’s over 89% for other minorities. Did you experience a similar rate at the Coast Guard Academy?

aa. CDO Farias: First, we have to make sure we work off of the same data. When one disaggregates, one finds that African-American males make up the lowest retention rate. It’s a big concern because it’s an equity issue. And once we identify that, we have to put something into practice. It’s important to isolate to ensure we get a fuller picture of the data. Admissions isn’t really to blame-- there is no way to predict how one will do four years from their admission. And we have to also go beyond the percentages and look at the raw numbers at well. We also need to make this data transparent so that people are able to see the same thing and come to similar conclusions. You won’t hear
a lot about diversity from me-- what it comes down to leadership and change. I promise we’ll all get uncomfortable.

3. Open Forum
   a. Nicole Updegrove: People have been complaining about a popular professor not getting tenure. Many people want more transparency in the process.
   b. Scott Elias: The university recently released a Public Safety audit report.
   c. Ben Marvin-Vanderryn: Someone suggested we try to hold one meeting in a public place so that people can see what goes on.

4. Committee Reports
   a. Alton Wang: OrgSync only works as a poll, so it’s not as official looking as our current system.
   b. Nicki Softness: People like looking at their group finance history on their e-portfolio. Can we bring that back?
   c. Alton Wang: As far as I’m aware, it never left!
   d. Rebecca Hutman: Regarding the Avenue Q puppet funding, there was some controversy over funding. If students start funding their own groups because of advantaged leaders, it could set a precedence for a trend of inequality.
   e. Nicki Softness: Well, we always encourage groups to fundraise as much as possible, so that’s what actually happened in that case. But, yes there is a big issue here.
   f. Nicole Brenner: A group with a larger endowment from outside fundraising or other sources takes the pressure off the SBC, which is good. Typically, however, we like to see what groups are spending and what they’re buying. It’s important for us to know how much money groups actually need because it helps us gauge the appropriate amount of funding to allocate.
   g. Jason Shatz: More groups should consult alternative funding before appealing to the SBC.

5. Elections Discussion
   a. Grant Tanenbaum: Why the hard spending limit? How much did Updegrove and Trexler spend? Why the declaration to run requirement and the four meeting requirement.
   b. Andrew Trexler: We didn’t spend anything beyond printing costs.
   c. Jacob Musinsky: If one has never seen a WSA meeting, it would be very tricky to know how to run a WSA meeting.
   d. Andrew Trexler: It would also be unfair because WSA members would be privy is when elections are and would be given an advantage over other candidates.
   e. Andrew Trexler: I think it’s unfair to make people attend WSA meetings before running. I also want to add a clause-- changing language in the appointments section-- they’re needed only for vacancies before the end of the first quarter. The spot would be filled in the next election.
   f. Ben Marvin-Vanderryn: I wanted to speak against the declaration to run clause. Could
we instead make it be when the election is announced instead of when the--
g. Andrew Trexler: The restriction is actually what you’re asking. I’m sorry I didn’t clarify.
h. Fred Ayres: 500 pages seems a bit excessive-- is that typical?
i. Andrew Trexler: It’s more of an equality issue, so while it might be much, it is needed.
j. Nicole Updegrove: I think we ought to have the four-meeting clause for Presidential
elections because this is a very serious role that comes with a huge time commitment
and requires a lot of background knowledge. A candidate should at least know what
the meetings are like and what kind of issues we work on. Besides, if a candidate won’t
give up four Sunday evenings to come to a meeting, then they probably aren’t serious
about this position.
k. Richard Fessler: On the hard spending limit, we should instead have a soft spending limit
to allow for a bit of leeway.
l. Andrew Trexler: ‘Hard’ would not end up in the official language. The elections
committee doesn’t usually ask for receipts typically.
m. Grant Tanenbaum: I want to second Richard.
n. Andrew Trexler: The $25 limit would also be on the winter elections, not just the
presidential election. I also support Richard’s point.
o. Nicole Brenner: I think the declaration is too restrictive. We should discuss further. I
don’t think that it’s appropriate for the assembly to vote on these items without more
time to review and discuss them.
p. Jason Shatz: I know we want people who do have the experience but we also seek
some fresh faces. There may be a temptation for new faces but especially since we’re
not always a popular body, if we have new faces, we might have some way with
reconnecting with the student body. When you’re talking about EC especially with
presidential elections, experience is key. It’s good to know about WSA procedures.
Some of the best fixers can be those with inside knowledge. I think $25 is a reasonable
campaign limit-- people will eschew the need to print with the use of online campaigns
and word of mouth.
q. Rebecca Hutman: I wonder if it would be beneficial to add language about
accountability.
r. Trexler: This language is already there.
s. Rebecca Hutman: Is it clear that soft limits won’t be monitored?
t. Trexler: Well, they’re already in the by-laws.
u. Nicole Updegrove: In regards to the declaration - one shouldn’t be able to start
campaigning before the election is even declared. Someone in the WSA might decide in
February, while others might not know about the election and start campaigning until
April, which puts them at a huge disadvantage.
v. Ben Marvin-Vanderryn: We should consider the meeting requirement tonight. If we
require people to come to meeting, we should definitely allow them to have as much
time as possible.
w. Andrew Trexler: I’d like to have a straw poll regarding how one plans to vote on the required meeting clause
x. STRAW POLL: 14 YES, 15 NO, 5 UNDECIDED
y. Andrew Trexler: This is really unfair and inequitable towards the student body.
z. Nicole Updegrove: Someone who considered running for VP last year nearly decided to run in late April, having never attended a full meeting. A meeting requirement is a hurdle, yes, but the WSA Presidency is a serious commitment. The requirement also prevents last-minute scheming.
 aa. Madison Moore: The declaration doesn’t really matter here– one can still get a lot of support with just one week.
 bb. Jacob Musinsky: Because one starts to campaign earlier, there’s a far larger chance of name recognition.
 cc. Izzy Linzer: The intent to run is still very vague. We shouldn’t vote on something that vague right now.
 dd. Mansoor Alam: In response to Nicole, if the students want someone to be in the WSA, it’s far more equitable than having someone who’s already experienced in the WSA. Let’s leave it up to students to decide should be and not be here.
 ee. Grant Tanenbaum: If someone from outside the WSA would want to run for President, it would be far more equitable for them to be able to run earlier. There should also not be a restriction on the meetings candidates need to attend.
 ff. Ben Marvin-Vanderryn: We shouldn’t set requirements to let fewer students run, especially considering we’re supposed to represent the student body. We should be obliged if the student body wants a president without going to meeting.
 gg. Nicole Updegrove: On the declaration clause, if someone wants to run from abroad, there is also a huge disadvantage if another candidate starts campaigning early.
 hh. Scott Elias: We shouldn’t isolate the WSA as a more exclusive body. We should trust student opinion on an issue– we shouldn’t decide how individuals conduct their campaigns. I’m open to the money limit, however.
 ii. Bruno Machiavelo: There’s no way to prove people were at meetings. One might have class on Sunday night as well, and won’t be able to attend WSA meetings.
 jj. Andrew Trexler: Regarding the declaration, name recognition is everything in elections. The elections season is growing longer and longer and I think it takes away from the effectiveness of the WSA.
 kk. Richard Fessler: I want to propose a straw poll concerning tabling this issue.
 ll. Andrew Trexler: I’d like to propose a countermeasure to just get through stack.
 mm. Ben Marvin-Vanderryn: The elections committee has to come to the WSA with guidelines two meetings before the elections so that we’re not under the gun in terms of time.
nn. Nicole Brenner: Let’s table this and then look at the official language next week. It’s a disservice to the assembly to vote or approve something that’s incomplete, and we don’t have all the information we should in order to make an informed vote. We shouldn’t restrict elections any more if we truly want to get new people on the WSA.

oo. Aidan Martinez: Elections seem to have gone well enough to suggest that there aren’t too many problems. The chances aren’t really necessary right now.

pp. Ellen Paik: If someone didn’t know anything about the WSA and won, it might seem scary to us, but to the student body, it’d be what the student body would want. It shows the student body put their support behind the candidate.

qq. Sadasia McCutchen: Let’s keep the $25 limit. The presidential election is such a big election that anyone planning to run will be willing to put the time in to find out about the WSA. By having people who haven’t been on the WSA, it would be a very fresh perspective and would help with our PR—we’re not just an elitist group as we offer the opportunity for others to join.

rr. Mansoor Alam: It would best if candidates didn’t spend money at all.

ss. Patrick Keogh: We shouldn’t restrict elections.

tt. Victor Zhao: Do we have an impeachment system? If a WSA member doesn’t do work, then what happens?

uu. Andrew Trexler: They can be brought forward if 2/3rds of the assembly petition for impeachment proceedings.

vv. Grant Tanenbaum: If someone doesn’t know about the WSA and our lesser known guidelines, they’re more likely to break our election rules.

6. New Business and Announcements

   a. Kate: We want to have a large discussion this week regarding the points system. Administrators want to know more about whether or not students like it.

   b. Bruno Machiavelo: We are changing GRS a lot this year. Please let me know what your ideas are.

   c. Nicki Softness: Let’s limit the GA gossip on former elections.

   d. Nicole Updegrove: A committee is convening to talk about remedies to the vandalism problem on campus - contact me if you are interested in working on this issue.

   e. Mansoor Alam: When one goes through the minutes, make sure you make note of changes. Also, bring them up during the next meeting.

   f. Andrew Trexler: Do your research before presenting issues to President Roth during the next meeting.

   g. Nicole Brenner: I think it would be useful to have some data on vandalism in terms of what is and isn’t and where it occurs.

   h. Jason Shatz: We shouldn’t table many issues. The clock is running out on the semester. Let’s not be fast to table topics.
Meeting Adjourned: 10:00 pm

Respectfully Submitted,
Fred Ayres ’17