General Assembly Meeting: February 17, 2013

Disclaimer: Meeting minutes are not official until approved by the General Assembly. While every attempt is made to insure accuracy, minutes should not be considered a verbatim account of proceedings.

Agenda:
Opening of the Meeting: Meeting called to order at 6:30pm

1. Fight song and role call
2. **Motion to close the meeting. Passes**
3. **Motion to reopen the meeting. Passes**
4. Open Forum
   a. Phabinly and Luciana: We have evidence that certain students groups are being funded more than other student groups. One of the reasons we didn’t get our money was because not one student group could receive that much money, but another group was given almost the same amount of funds in the same week. We’ve heard consistently that there is favoritism that goes on. We want to prepare an event that brings students, faculty, staff and recent graduates together. We sent out a survey that said showed there would be a lot of interest in a black tie event to honor and recognize people on Wesleyan campus that have done a lot of diversity work. We were funded tables, no chairs, no cutlery and no tent- the SBC could not justify why they could not fund a tent. We felt a bit sabotaged by the response that we got. We weren’t funded for bringing the Beckham’s surviving family members to campus. We worked hard to find the cheapest option for all the items we were requesting, we talked with President Roth and he liked all our ideas and expressed his support for us. In terms of places to have this event, we wanted an open venue because the event is open to everyone. The other venue options could not house all the students invited.
   b. Sam Ebb: The Executive Committee decided that the Student Group Fair in the fall would not use a tent to save money.
   c. Nicole Brenner: The reasons why chairs weren’t funded was because the price of the chairs seemed a bit excessive. The cutlery wasn’t funded because we didn’t think that it was the cheapest option, and wanted clarification. The other group that you were talking about was funding an event that was a very different type of event. It is an academic and cultural conference open to the whole campus and to students at other schools. It’s not that we can’t allot that much money to a student group, it’s just that the amount you were requesting is greater than our weekly budget. We weren’t sure about all the details and we’d be very willing to
negotiate future costs. We thought that $6000 worth of items could be reduced in price and should be reconsidered.

d. Luciana: The chairs weren’t in red- we wished that you had consulted us beforehand regarding the specifics behind your decision.

e. Mansoor: To reiterate something that the SBC said, we really liked the idea of what you proposed to us. The event was planned a bit late, and we thought there were cheaper options regarding the budget. We wanted to show you that we’re trying to work with you but that it’s difficult when we’re not receiving not much compromise back.

f. Luciana: We registered late because we couldn’t register as an individual group, but had to register as a student group. We’ve been planning this events for months, but we ran into some trouble. It’s not that we’re not willing to move our location, it’s that we think the tent could host more people.

g. Zach M: Please let us know if there are any problems with the Student Group registration process. Nicole and I have been talking and we hope that we can figure something out in the future. The SBC in general is excited by this event and we’re hopeful that the event can be pushed through and that the essentials can be funded but we need to figure out more details regarding the high cost.

h. Luciana: We respect that but we think that more details

i. Lily D: Have you looked at hosting this event at Freeman?

j. Phabinly: We would run into problems regarding cooking and preparing food.

k. Sam Ebb: You said that Roth is very supportive of this idea- it’s very possible you could use his support to help your situation.

l. Luciana: That doesn’t sound too bad, but we thinks it sounds hypocritical to get we want when others wouldn’t be able to get the same things.

m. Sam Ebb: Roth could help you make this part of Wesleyan tradition and I think that you could ask for his advice and help regarding organizing this potential tradition.

n. Arya: What can be changed about the way the SBC can be run? In my four years on the WSA, the current format is the best that I’ve seen. It’s difficult for us to reach a consensus with seven people in the room- we’d appreciate your suggestions and concerns.

o. Luciana: Wesleyan is the only school that I know of that where students are the ones in charge of allocating funds for student groups.

p. Phabinly: I have a friend who requested funds and wasn’t initially funded. She went through SBC funding history and found a similar event that had been funded, and was able to get funding the second time. We wanted to address these inconsistencies.
q. Nicole Brenner: That was a very different situation, and it was presented
differently the first time than it was the second time. We also don’t typically fund
conferences.

r. Jason: We have tried to remedy inconsistencies. But regarding that example, we
initially thought that the conference was used for social networking purposes
only. But the second time, it was framed in a light that we agreed with.

s. Mansoor: POI: The event was online was titled an “optimal networking
opportunity”.

t. Nicole Updegrove: I understand why you would want a detailed explanation for
their reasoning, but it just isn’t time-efficient. It would add hours to send a line-
by-line explanation to every student on top of the many hours of work the SBC
already does every week. When students follow up with the SBC (as you’re doing
now) to look for specific information, I’m sure they’re more than happy to give it.

u. Jason: POI: To share some technical information, our current program only allows
for us to type a certain number of characters.

v. Arya: The system we have is definitely flawed, but the SBC takes minutes for
every minute and while some events are black and white regarding decision-
making, others are quite grey which is why we take minutes. Perhaps in the
future we can have it be more known that the SBC can be emailed for more
explanations. But a public explanation may not be in order.

w. Christian: Are we not being accountable enough? Because it’s different if you’re
just upset about not getting enough funding.

x. Luciana: I think the current process should be restructured. I’m not trying to
attack the SBC. We worked very hard to create an itemized budget- we think that
the SBC should put in an extra effort to explain their decisions like we work hard
to create budgets.

y. Jesse: Point of inquiry: is there a distinction between funding larger requests and
small requests?

z. Nicole Brenner: No, there is not.

aa. Jesse: Point of inquiry: Is there some way that the SBC can conditionally approve
requests for some budget requests and negotiate others so that an event can move
forward?

bb. Nicole Brenner: There’s no formal system, for that, but we often do partial
funding and then defer other parts of the request until we can get more
information.

cc. Jesse: I think that there should be a more formal way to deal with large events that
exceed a certain amount of money ($10000?)

dd. Christian: Point of inquiry: is there a process to appeal to the SBC?

ee. Nicole Brenner: No, it’s not usually necessary and is usually handled through
email
ff. Phabinly: Events like Spring Fling that promote underage drinking and drug use are being funded large sums of money while an event like ours that promotes cohesion and diversity isn’t. We see that Nicole Brenner is approving these requests and we can’t understand why else ours wouldn’t be approved.

gg. Jacob: With $80000 it’s difficult to fund Spring Fling events and Spring Fling is for the whole school, while this event would be for about 300 people.

hh. Mansoor: To respond to Jesse, our process is very faith-based because we need to trust that students will take care of equipment and use their resources to the best of the ability. Can we know the sources for your data and survey?

ii. Phabinly: I have receipts that show that the WSA was sent this survey. I also have access to lots of other listservs as an RA and I have accessed a lot of people with this survey.

jj. Mansoor: Straw poll: who got the survey in this group? 11 students raise their hands

kk. Sam Ebb: I think that administrators not allocating our funds is one of the great things about our school because students can really take control of what happens on campus.

ll. Luciana: I’m not the saying that the SBC turn into administrators, I hope to see more consistencies. I want to know that the feedback that I get is communicated to me.

mm. Phabinly: We are willing to survey the entire school and figure out if the SBC should be able to fund student groups.

nn. Grant:: Every year we have Constitutional Review, we assess all aspects of our Bylaws and Constitution, including how the SBC allocates funds. Constitutional Review is open to all students, we send out an all campus email that its happening and we encourage people to attend. Also, through petition any student can propose a change in our Constitution throughout the year. Any student can choose to run for the assembly or get in touch with us at anytime. We publish a full list of what we’ve funded every week on our website. I strongly encourage you to attend Constitutional Review.

oo. Zach: Motion to close stack. Passes

pp. Arya: I think it’s easy to say that seven students are inadequate- the difficult part is to think of a better solution. We’d love to hear your suggestions. There are lots of groups that are established to organize large, big-budget events. The large-budget items that we’ve funded in the past, are national conferences or events that are regarded

qq. Andrew Trexler: Adding to what Grant said, we have multiple levels of oversight. Members of the assembly are elected, and then those members are internally elected. Anyone can be on the SBC, and the WSA is transparent with its process and information. We have a Constitutional Review that goes through a long
process that involves the entire school voting to approve any changes made to the
Constitution. I personally would fight against any action that would mean that any
faculty/administrative member would be in charge of student money.

rr. Lily: I yield my time to the floor.

ss. Jake: I’d like to commend the SBC for their hard work. I yield my time to the
floor.

tt. Jacob: I think that this event is going to happen because of the hard work you’ve
put in. What options have you looked into for alternate funding?

uu. Luciana: We have looked into lots of different options. The people attending are
paying for their food, we just need th

vv. Lanell: I think that the SBC should have someone who deals with money
professionally. I think there should be an online form that allows for people to
request funds online. I also think that there should be two or so more people on
the SBC whose sole purpose is to condense the minutes and send it to people
because it’s clear that transparency is a problem.

ww. Mansoor: I yield my time.

xx. Christian: Thank you for coming here to help us try to make the SBC better. The
SBC does a great job in my opinion but productive critique is necessary

yy. Phabinly: To Arya- if you look at the fiscal year of 2012, there are many groups
that are funded large-budget events. To Trex- it’s extremely difficult to access the
information that you say is available to us.

zz. Nicole Brenner: We never meant to offend you or sabotage you, we have just
been trying to do our best at our jobs.

aaa. Luciana: Darling, Put yourselves in our shoes- how would you feel if you
were funded tables but no chairs?

5. Minutes
   a. Nicole Updegrove: Motion to postpone approval of the minutes to the next
      meeting - Passed

6. Budget Sustainability Task Force
   a. Zach: We’re opening up our document of recommendations to the GA.
   b. Arya: I’ve talked with lots of athletics-involved students and faculty and they
      have not been consulted about this issue. I think it’s ridiculous that athletes have
to fundraise.
   c. Jason: I think this a good way to be sustainable.
   d. Michael Linden: I didn’t receive a lot of feedback from our athletic community
      and it’s definitely something that we need to work on.
   e. Zach: It’s definitely very helpful to hear that.
   f. Sam: There are lots of teams that would be heavily affected by budget cuts in
      athletics. We should definitely look into the budget critically and see if there are
      things to be cut, but in its current form I think that it is flawed.
g. Martin: What are we discussing? Are we giving these points to President Roth?

h. Andrew Trexler: This document was a preliminary one. The purpose of this conversation is to get preliminary input from you all.

i. Martin: To streamline the conversation, could we go through the document and have people talk about certain points?

j. Jesse: We’re assuming that people have read the document and operating on that judgment.

k. Andrew Trexler: I highly doubt that many aspects of this recommendation will still exist in its final form. Specifically the supposed provision requiring students to contribute work to the upkeep of the university.

l. Lily: I agree with Scott’s email. Regarding selling houses, could you talk more about this?

m. Andrew Trexler: As a student recommendation, this document is written from the perspective of students.

n. Adam: Is looking into replacing houses with dormitories an option for the long run?

o. Michael Linden: Definitely something that we are looking into. If we sold the housing, we could sell it to someone in bulk to one contractor (so as to not flood the market) for renting in pieces.

p. Christian: I have a problem with a lot of these recommendations but I commend the Budget Task Force for doing a difficult job. For some of these points, the social costs outweigh the financial benefits. Firstly, the waitlist model. I thought that this is pretty close to what the admissions office was doing already. Secondly, I think that Arya and Scott’s points are very valid and would take away a lot of prospective students.

q. Jesse: With respect to the waitlist, it’s in comparison to last year, presumably the waitlist was need-blind. That was the policy in 2011-2012. The number of people we’ve admitted on the waitlist has changed dramatically from year to year, but in the past it was at times more than 50 people. So it’s unclear how many would be affected, but the official response is that using the waitlist only gives them less control. But literally every step in the direction towards need-blind gives them less control of the budget and more discretion over considering applicants’ ability to pay. This isn’t a perfect model, but it at least distinguishes between need-blind and need-aware students so you know where you stand. And for the record, none of these options is win-win. If it were, it would have been implemented already.

r. Trexler: The things I see as win-win are stopping the building new buildings and stopping the increases to the size of the student body.

s. Jesse: Point of Information: Those are the two things the administrators agreed with.
t. Trexler: You’re partly correct. As for the waitlist, Nancy gives inconsistent information. Also, we see the waitlist model as more morally sound rather than necessarily more fiscally sound.

u. Adam: I know students that were students off the waitlist that are some of our most outstanding students on campus.

v. Jake: Motion to move to the next agenda item? [No second]. Motion to make stack? [Motion passes]

w. Zach: Are there questions regarding this topic that we should expand on in the future?

x. Sam Ebb: As much as underclassmen will cringe, it’s worth looking at other institutions and how they do housing. Our practice is really unique, even in how early students get singles. In other places, seniors live in dorms and people have doubles as late as junior year. And there’s a lot we can do within the structures we already have that’s better than what other schools have.

y. Glenn: Regarding the second suggestion of replacing staff workers, what the specifics behind this recommendation?

z. Michael Linden: Our concern with layoffs was that we would try to avoid firing people, and it wouldn’t be our immediate cost-saving means. We have janitorial staff that have a “tenured” status- these are staff members that are encroaching retirement.

aa. Glenn: And what about staff in certain places like Senior Fauver that you consider to be unnecessary?

bb. Michael Linden: I don’t have an answer to that

cc. Trexler: That was looking at a social norming aspect- we didn’t think that we needed as many janitorial staff members. We thought that we could have students take care of themselves more.

dd. Lily Donahue: What about leaving the maintenance of housing more up to the students, as daunting as that may sound? That could definitely be something we look into and lobby for. We on the Fire Safety and Facilities Appeals Board are currently looking into certain facilities fines, and the solution for some issues may be giving students more responsibility over upkeep, especially in student houses.

e. Michael Linden: I just wanted to respond to Sam. We looked into other schools, and Wesleyan is a lot more generous with space than other schools. A couple of our program houses are very energy and cost ineffective but we are aware that they are important to campus culture.

ff. Jesse: In terms of gut reactions to our recommendations, we wanted to create this preliminary document to start the conversation about students having more responsibility, not to suggest that students *should* have to pay for more things. And very few students came to our fora or filled out our surveys, so if you have any recommendations as to how we might solicit more feedback, that would be
great. Additionally, our interest in consolidating administrative positions stands in
direct opposition to something the Committee for Inclusion and Diversity brought
up about more full-time positions for the office of diversity, so I’d love to have
that conversation. We’re the only school that has a VP of diversity, as far as I
know.

gg. Christian: It is definitely difficult to try to figure out the priorities on campus.
It would be great to have a dialogue regarding the impacts of different
administrative positions on campus climate.

hh. Arya: My freshman year we had a very similar, very intense discussion. And this
could be the guiding document for the next five years, so pay attention. The Green
ii. Street Arts Center is still around because of a discussion we had in this room
three years ago. So consider this hard, especially if you’re an underclassmen - this
document could shape the rest of your time here.
jj. Andrew Trexler: As a final comment, to Arya’s point, you know who’s on the
task force so feel free to email us with suggestions/concerns. We’ll continue to
solicit feedback until we make our final recommendations in April.

7. Committee Reports
8. New Business and Announcements

Meeting Adjourned: 10:40pm

Respectfully Submitted,
Grant Tanenbaum ‘15, Ellen Paik ‘16, Nicole Updegrove ‘14