

Report to the Board of Trustees Vassar Student Association

October 2017

Overview

VSA Executive Board 2017-2018

- President: Anish Kanoria '18, Economics and Political Science, Correlate in Mathematics
- Vice-President: Cody Harmon '19, Education, Correlates in Anthropology and Prison Studies
- Chair of Equity & Inclusion: Tamar Ballard '19, Urban Studies, Correlate in Computer Science
- Chair of Residential Affairs: Takunda Maisva '19, Biology, Correlate in Music
- Chair of Academics: Joaquim Goncalves '18, Anthropology, Correlate in International Politics
- Chair of Organizations: Patrick DeYoung '18, Political Science
- Chair of Finance: Robyn Lin '18, International Studies

VSA Leadership and Elections

In the elections held in Spring 2017, Miranda Amey '19 was elected as VSA President and Anish Kanoria '18 as Vice-President. In June 2017, Miranda informed the VSA Executive Board that she was taking a leave of absence from the college for the Fall of 2017. Pursuant to the VSA Constitution and Bylaws, Miranda tendered her resignation and Anish Kanoria succeeded her as VSA President. A new Vice-President was elected along with the first year Senators in September with Anish also serving as the interim Vice-President till then. This did not impede any functions of the VSA and only underscored its strength and tenacity.

Guiding Principles and Committee Goals

The Guiding Principles of the Second VSA Senate were passed in May 2017. They reaffirmed the VSA's commitment to work towards "anti-racism and intersectional feminism" as well as underscored the VSA's promise to be an action oriented and self-critical body.

The themes that encapsulate the VSA's priorities are:

- Transparency,
- Equity
- Accountability

These commitments, especially that of equity, are reflected in our projects and the current make-up of the VSA Senate itself – it is the most diverse VSA in Vassar's history and also has the first international student to be VSA President leading it.

Pursuant to our Guiding Principles, each committee of the VSA drew up a list of goals for the year, elaborated on how they would achieve them and by when.

Projects with Long Term Implications

Student Discourse Forum

The Student Discourse Forum is one of the flagship projects of this VSA. This online discourse platform is meant to be an *intentional space*, not simply a social one. It is a space to address the issues that students are facing and have meaningful and serious discussions with other members of the community about how those issues can be resolved. The VSA plans on launching this by November 2017.

VSA Website

In line with our commitment towards transparency and accountability, the VSA is replacing the current and outdated website with a new one. This new website will not only have attendance records for Senators, but also a section where people will be able to track progress on VSA projects and promises made by administrators to students. It will also highlight things like the Student Discourse Forum and relevant all-campus news.

Dorm Beautification

Through the Dorm Beautification project, residential houses will work together with the VSA Committee on Equity and Inclusion in order to create a visual representation of affirming statements for different groups on campus. These messages will help ensure that the house is holding itself accountable for making students feel welcome, and it also works as a beautiful way of affirming that every Vassar student is welcome not only in the residential spaces, but on the campus as a part of the Vassar community.

Health Services and AEO

Members of the VSA and the VSA Health and Wellness Committee are working closely with President Bradley to make changes in the Office of Accessibility and Educational Opportunity (AEO) and other health related services on campus. The committee created an AEO Response Form that engaged the rest of the student body in gathering stories and highlighted the urgency for change in these offices.

What To Do If List

There are many on campus resources that are beneficial for the health and wellbeing of students that both the VSA in the past and the College as a whole do not advertise in a timely and effective manner. The VSA Board of Residential Affairs is creating a *What To Do If* list that will highlight some of the common scenarios students find themselves in and offer the immediate action needed to be taken in order to resolve the issues.

Bridging the Athlete/Non-Athlete Divide

With the apparent divide between student athletes and non-athletes, the VSA Board of Residential Affairs and the Committee on Health and Wellness are working together to bridge the gap. The idea is to work with the College to restructure first year orientation in way that makes athletes feel part of their fellow-group, house and class as well as hold conversation spaces.

Ongoing projects

Project.Period

Project.Period was started by the VSA in Spring 2016 to provide free menstrual products to those who need them. Boxes of these products are placed in bathrooms in dorms and academic buildings. There is now a long-term structure in place to ensure the continuity of this project with a dedicated budget and student network. The project has moved to decomposable period products that are affordable and sustainable. They will be restocked every 3 weeks with two rounds of stocking already accomplished.

Support for Student Organizations

There are now 145 student organizations on campus certified by the VSA. The Organizations Committee of the VSA is undertaking a full audit of all current student organizations for the purpose of maintaining an up-to-date and accessible roster of all active student organizations for the student body. To aid this process, the VSA Senate has approved a pre-org freeze for the Fall 2017 semester.

Further, the committee is moving towards a facilitation role as opposed to a punitive body that only enforces rules. One of the ideas is to institute a mechanism to reward student organizations that have performed exceptionally well.

NYC Shuttle

The NYC Shuttle project was started in Spring 2016 to provide access to Vassar students to New York City at extremely low cost (\$2-5). Trips are scheduled monthly and are daylong. This project is ongoing and has been met with success.

Finance

The Finance Committee of the VSA is working with student organizations and other constituents to navigate the implementation of Workday. It is organizing numerous training sessions and thinking about the implications for the VSA especially with regards to annual budgeting and fund transfers.

The committee is also in the process of restructuring its working to have greater transparency in its decision making process, diversify the body and include more voices that are not elected to the VSA Senate.

Engaged Pluralism Initiative

The VSA is working closely with the Engaged Pluralism Initiative (EPI) and has a designated representative in each of its working groups. Further, the VSA President is a member of the EPI Steering Committee. This ensures that there is student accountability for EPI and the process is not repetitive.

Mental Health Fair

The VSA Committee on Health and Wellness is holding the first ever Mental Health Fair on December 7th in collaboration with other health offices on campus. It is a campus wide event meant to push people to take care of themselves through finding their own activity that works for them.

Restructuring

The VSA Operations Committee continues to monitor the efficacy of the restructured VSA and recommend changes accordingly. Some ideas that are being developed are: having some sort of plenary with campus student leadership and restructure the Chair of Finance role to make it more sustainable.

Other actions taken

DACA

The VSA organized free shuttles to take students to protests in New York City and Poughkeepsie against the US Government's decision on DACA. The VSA Committee on Equity & Inclusion also created a DACA Response and Resource Form to help decide on how to best support students and members of the community affected by the news.

Dining

The VSA sponsored the pizza dinner organized by the Student/Labor Dialogue group after the student protest organized at the All Campus Dining Center in light of the working conditions there. We are also in touch with the administration to follow up with them regarding progress on the working conditions.

The VSA is optimistic and energized about its work and student life at Vassar. We also acknowledge the new and welcome way in which President Bradley engages with students and the Vassar Student Association as we chart the next phase of Vassar's history in making the college accessible and equitable for all members of our community.

Respectfully submitted,

Anish Kanoria, VSA President
On behalf of the VSA Executive Board