

Bowdoin Student Government

Meeting of the Bowdoin Student Government

7 November 2007

30 College Street

- I. **Call to Order** at 8:05 pm
- II. **Roll call:** Amir Abdullah and James Harris are absent. Justin Foster is tardy and Tony Thrower leaves early.

Dustin asks everyone who is not a regular BSG meeting attendee to introduce him or herself. Abbie Brown is here about the SIS, Robert Kern is representing Communications, Deans Leslie Levy and Margaret Hazlett are here, also about the student information project. Students Sean Morris, Jimmy Lindsay and Shelby Davies are here concerning the SIS. Chris Adams is here about the SAFC. Travis the Orient Reporter is in attendance. James Higginbotham is on the committee that deals with determining whether or not classes fill distribution requirements, and Dean Cornish is here from Academic Affairs.

- III. **Approval of the Minutes:** Let's look at the minutes and see if there are any corrections to be made. Kata moves to approve the minutes. Approval passes unanimously.
- IV. **Public Comment Time:** No visitors have comments at this time.
- V. **Student Information System Update With Abbie Brown:** Abbie thanks the group for the invitation. She says that this project is just starting, and she wants to talk about the timeline as well as get input from students for this project. Over the last couple years, there has been feedback regarding online academic planning as well as online registration. The key messages that she wants to leave are that: (1) This isn't just about online registration. It's a broader perspective on planning and the options out there. (2) We are just starting, so the scope of this could be huge or small. We're just talking about the possibilities now. (3) We want to know how can we best gather student opinions. We want to talk about the current system, our projection for the scope, and options for which system to adopt.

The first visual describes what could happen in a particular project. It's about how the customer describes what he or she wants and how a designer could hear this. It suggests that unless someone is very clear about what they want, the product may not match the expectations.

Abbie says that she included a visual of the current infrastructure as well. The concept is that there is a central system (James), which they then have to extract from, because it can't be updated. Bearings sits on top of that. We hear that Bearings is slow and that there is minimal access to

planning tools. We send data to a lot of areas, which is what the bottom tells us.

The first slide addresses the question: Why can't we just add online registration to what we have? We would have to create another environment, and we don't want to be in the business of developing the underlying system. People are familiar with how slow Bearings is around registration. It's just not technically able to keep up. When she talked about options for this system, some colleges include a lot of areas, but we are focused on a place to put courses. Once the virtual catalogue is available, faculty can develop an offering: time, media requirements, classroom size. They also want access to student information, so there is a repository for that. They are also looking at including a ResLife module. We want a way to be able to add courses easily and to have offerings easily. We want online registration. When students fill out the card, they look at conflicts for time, but sometimes miss lab conflicts or things like that. There would be a way to signal that online. We aren't looking to move to a first-come-first-serve registration. We still want students to have first-choices, alternatives, and professor decisions regarding priority. Steve will talk about degree progress.

Steve Cornish says that students want to keep track of progress toward graduation. They would like an easy means to see what requirements a student has taken care of or how they have progressed. They want this available also to the faculty advisor so that everyone is working off the same page. It will allow students to know exactly where they are. Abbie continues that there is an interface that can be accessed by the advisor, faculty, students, and staff. She wanted to have Steve talk about the tools that they are discussing, but also have Rob talk about the student experience. Steve says that all the information enters Bowdoin Web...test scores, high school transcript, maybe even statements that the student makes about their education. The advisor can record notes about meetings with a student. At the moment, we are looking at something to allow advising to be much more efficient. It should stimulate more meetings with the advisor.

Abbie says that something that is important is that the interface be extremely efficient. In talking with other schools, it's all about how efficient that interface is. It shouldn't be like going around the block to get next door. Rob says that he is involved in the Bowdoin website. Once a system like this is built, the interaction will be entirely web-based. We want something that's usable, accessible, etc. We want to engage people in figuring out how students want to be able to use this system and balance it against what the system can actually do. This will be an asset for the college that's not all that different from a building...it is an investment that will be highly usable. Done well, it could be something that Bowdoin is well-respected for. He's happy to discuss the web in general and how this will have an interface. He works in the Communication Office.

Abbie points to the product selection timeline. She has talked to many schools and done many visits. There are only 5 or 6 products to choose from. Experiences are very different depending on implication. Some vendors have multiple products. We are sending out an RFI to hear more about Student Information Systems...to ask about technical issues and cost. We will whittle it

down to 2 or 3 and bring proposals up with very specific requests. We will decide toward the end of February. We also want some focus groups. This will happen from November through January. It will really continue even after this, too. The next two pages describe our two options: take a major player and implement it regularly (these are sometimes too streamlined, though, and must be customized), or we could get a lower-cost system. Provided that it has repositories, we build the interface on top of it to meet our needs. Do we get a vanilla product, then, or buy an engine to build around?

She wants to emphasize that this isn't just online registration. Also, we don't know the full scope, and we are working to get feedback when this becomes part of the process. Margaret says that Ben F is chairing the committee of students to deal with this. Questions and comments about the system?

- Will says that in conversations he has had with Mitch Davis, Mitch indicated that the weirdness of the Bowdoin system has prevented this before. For that reason, he feels that the second option would be better. A user-interface would best suit what we want to be doing. Abbie says that schools seem to like this option. Will asks if the college has the capacity to do this kind of interface-design, or if they would be contracting out. Abbie says that if they did go with option two, part of the proposal would be about bringing people in.
- Sam D asks if there would be potential to build things onto the systems. Abbie says that they are trying to make sure that the system has the ability to be integrate-able. It can't be a closed system like the older ones are. We need to be able to go in and grab and update data.
- Rutledge is imagining the ideal way to make a schedule. He envisions making his day. It would be like a timeline where you could click a time-spot...for example...the afternoon. Then the classes that are available pop up. Then he can opt to look for classes that would take care of his requirements. Abbie clarifies that it would build it by time as well as work by requirements.
- Darren says that a lot of the problem with advising is that students just sign cards. The system could be used to make sure that students are meeting requirements. Maybe the system could take care of this, which would help the communication with advisors be about other things: to make it less focused on these formalities.
- Kristen says that being able to search for courses with specific departmental requirements would be helpful, too. There's no easy way to check for classes that meet those requirements now.
- Kata is concerned how this will affect the overall advising relationship. How would the advisor sign off? Abbie says that they have had a lot of conversations regarding this issue. It would have to go to an inbox. Steve says that it could be very mechanistic...going to an office, etc. They feel that a relationship is essential and are trying to figure out how to make this happen. Steve says that if they can run an analysis on a frequent basis to see what classes are required, they can try to have those classes available. They could go to the departments and indicate what classes need to be offered.

- Sam D asks if there could be a feature where course syllabi are available, or maybe that courses are available for review a couple semesters ahead so that planning could be larger-scale.
- Jess says that when she makes her first and second choices, sometimes they aren't in the same time slot. She continues explaining the cycle of classes not fitting together as they are shifted around. She talked to some professors about getting classes further ahead of time. A lot of departments don't have options to plan that. Econ, for example, doesn't know who will be available or willing to teach certain classes. Steve says that this change could come with the introduction of a student information system. It could force departments to think about what classes to offer. There will always be some unpredictability, but it could encourage professors to think ahead.
- Dan would like an easy way to check course reviews, especially if a more thorough system is developed.
- Dean Hazlett encourages people to think beyond efficiency and more about the advising curriculum. Think about educational goals and what is helpful about having advising discussions. Be creative.
- Clark says that Bearings is closed from 2 to 6 in the morning. The new system will be accessible 24 hours.
- Sam K sees housing on the lower right, ominously. How much of this would encompass the other systems, like CSGold, OneCard and Millennium? Abbie says that they just brought in people from other departments to talk about this issue. From what she understands, there is an initiative to move Millennium into CSGold. We are talking about what is necessary to integrate with CSGold, not replace it. We don't know if it will be good enough.
- Dustin mentions integrating student employment, housing, financial aid, and access to the bursar's office. Abbey says that that is part of student information but a separate path. They want to be able to make payments online. That should be implemented next May. You should be able to put money on the OneCard there too.
- Jess says that she has a friend at Arizona State, where (for anyone who isn't familiar with it) they have an amazing system. It's first-come-first-serve, but majors still have priority. There could also be different times for registration based on priority. We could see if this makes sense for our system. Abbey says that all the big systems have priority timing like this. They want to be able to make sure that junior majors also get priority, etc.; that's where it starts breaking down.
- Darren asks how this fits in with Blackboard. Abbey says that some products have buttons for direct BlackBoard integration. They are looking for integration, not replacement.
- Dooley asks about TimePro. There needs to be access to TimePro from this. The new face for this should be in two and a half months. It's browser-independent (Mac or PC).

VI. Academic Affairs Discussion with Steven Cornish, Dean for Curriculum and James Higginbotham, Professor of Classics and member of the Curriculum

Committee: Dean Cornish says that he received 11 Questions to address, so he needs to decide where to start. One thing to say is that they are monitoring the effect of the new requirements. There will be some major review at some stage. The other thing that is worth looking at is where we need to produce more courses to fulfill certain requirements. This is largely the role of the subcommittee.

Prof. Higginbotham says that the review of courses was entirely separate last year. They often didn't know at all how these fit into the requirements. Now everything is in one house, which is much better. There are some areas where there are gaps, but they reflect philosophical reasons (why an upper-level class wouldn't fit a requirement). Also, some lower level classes don't engage at the level that is required to fulfill the standard. We want to make sure that the rationale that the professors provide makes sense. There has been a tendency to encourage as many possibilities as we can because of the effect of the "Bubble". We are beginning to question if a course that doesn't have a proposal be considered for a requirement. We are tenderly engaging professors on that level...approaching *them* about the class fulfilling requirements. We are looking at what spots we have to make sure that there is coverage. We also want to anticipate demand.

- Rutledge says that he was attracted to Bowdoin because of the lack of requirements. This was advertised, actually. One of his main problems making his first schedule was the sudden appearance of the distribution requirements. His first comment is that prospective students should have information that lines up with what they face when they get here. He also wants to hear what the idea behind adding the requirements was. Higginbotham says that there were six courses required before. It was still a significant chunk of the curriculum. There was a growing sense that those need to be retuned, and more directly. Some were hanging over from decades past. This had to be rethought. This was also a way to challenge professors to come up with courses to meet those standards. Therefore, it's not just an issue with the students in mind...it makes the faculty think more creatively about what they teach. Professors should be making these courses more focused products.
- Ben asks what the feedback from departments like Econ or Math is. Are those professors overextended because of people taking classes for requirements? Higginbotham says that everyone is worried. There are concerns about what changes need to be made to meet these requirements. There was intense dialogue early on about what level of course would meet the expectations for the requirements. Departments were asked to think about the curriculum across the board. What does a class need to be like to really understand the subject matter? Some of the beginning courses don't deal with these things at a level that satisfies this. That said, we look at the requirements to see if we are meeting our goals and that students have choices.
- Clark says that there isn't much incentive for professors applying for courses to meet these. Maybe they fear being swarmed by students just trying to meet these courses. It may make sense for an office or committee to be more

proactive in the process, then. Higginbotham says that they brought chairs in last year and laid out what was needed as a college. Some people were behind proactive approaches. They are actively on this. There are lists of people to contact every week. Clark wonders if there is a burden created when lower level classes don't meet requirements. Higginbotham says that it was not a haphazard choice. There are important things to learn at the 100 level that can be added onto at the next level

- Kristen sees this ties to the discussion about advising. It was easy when she came in as a freshman, but this is more complicated. It's a place to ask advisors to engage with their students about. Steve says that this has made advising more complicated, and it is part of the reason they are examining it now. There is more of a burden on the advisor to be aware how these things work. He also says that they are staying in touch with departments in monthly meetings with the chairs. The other point Steve wants to make is about explaining this to prospective students. It needs to be put in the context of what a liberal arts education means. What do we expect students to know? He comes from an institution with no distribution requirements. We need to look at the philosophy behind a liberal arts education and how this translates into requirements.
- Nicole wonders about the idea of ½ credits for labs. Are they discussing this in academic affairs? Could this be a way of rewarding students for going beyond? Steve says that he has not heard about this in Academic Affairs. They could bring it up if someone came to them. He doesn't think it would be an attractive option because they don't conceive of the lab as being a separate course, but very much part of it.
- Rutledge says the liberal arts education is an ideal. But put in the context of shooting for the liberal arts education vs. getting a real education, it looks different. Students are put in the dilemma of pursuing courses that they have heard about and are interested in, or of knocking another requirement of the list. It would be refreshing to see this in more broad terms. Steve wonders if this is about a selling exercise. It takes it back to advising. Rutledge says that it is a problem that what Bowdoin wants us to learn conflicts with what the student wants to learn.
- Dennis wonders about the second part of this form, regarding classes that don't fulfill requirements. Could this change, or is it set? Higginbotham says that some of these are already changed. They are already re-examining this. They now have time to ask why these courses don't count. They are getting responses. Students should contact departments or the office itself to clarify why courses don't count for requirements when it seems that they should.
- Ben L asks if there are explanations for what these things mean-why some classes don't fulfill requirements. It is written out somewhere? Higginbotham says that upper-level classes aren't included because there are usually intermediary courses that students took to get there. If this doesn't happen, it is a problem in the department. They need to look at changing that if there are people that jump in to higher levels.

Are there questions about Arabic? Steve wants to say that there are active discussion about this. They are trying to come up with creative solutions...maybe

working with Colby and Bates. It is certainly on the radar, and they recognize the importance. It may be solved, if they can hire the right individual. They are as flexible as possible. Students have gotten credit for Arabic taken away from Bowdoin.

- Ben F asks if there is talk of just getting an Arabic professor and crafting a department around this. Steve says that it is certainly something that they think about, but carefully. Hiring faculty is very expensive. They need to think about where to place this professor in the curriculum. They are in the process of analyzing language instruction at Bowdoin. They have not discarded this option. At this point in time, Arabic instructors are in high demand. There was a major in Middle Eastern studies at Brown that was highly unstable. These professors were in high demand elsewhere and getting research grants all the time. They were struggling to find courses for students to complete their majors.
- Darren asks about the pros and cons for teaching Arabic, and how long it would take once they decide that they want a professor. Steve says that it could be something as soon as next fall. Cooperative measures would be part of a longer process. It's something that they are looking at now.
- Dustin asks what group is pursuing the idea of Arabic. Steve says that it is his office, going through the CEP. Dustin says that some colleges have instructors, not full professors. Steve says that it is something that they have talked about. The question is how attractive it would be to offer classes that are not for credit.
- Ben F asks if there is talk about establishing a peer advisor system. Steve says that they are talking about it. There are a number of ways that it could happen. Students already in advising roles could be asked to take on the additional role that would be academic advising. The question is whether or not there is the capacity for students to take this on. The other option would be to create a separate group of peer academic advisors. We look at how successful ResLife is, for example, at recruiting proctors. The politics become sensitive. We could try a pilot, recruit some students, and observe the experiences of this first group. He thinks that it has to be part of the faculty advising system, though. Faculty need to be attracted to the idea. He thinks that they would like some kind of assistance. It's a fairly powerful notion, especially for incoming students to see these relationships modeled. They would want to start it fairly soon. The feedback indicates that there aren't any red flags in regard to introducing this. One of the ways to think about these structures is that they have some redundancy built into them. That way there are options and fall-backs. The key thing is to make sure that peer advisors are well-trained, and that they know the curriculum.
- Rutledge asks about the faculty pulse on Credit/D/Fail. Steve says that he gets the sense that they are looking for a change for distribution requirements. Rutledge asks what the motive is. Steve says that the original intent is not working. The intent was to stimulate students to explore parts of the curriculum that they are uncertain about. Rutledge says that for him, this is what the distribution requirements do...push students into uncomfortable areas. Credit/D/Fail is the phone-a-friend. It helps him not want to grab at

the money. Since it's already harder for the students to make meaningful decisions, there could be fallback support. Credit/D/Fail could have a tag-on, like an option for students to take a grade if they meet a pre-set level. Student would slack less if there was the possibility to get that set grade. It's a second chance for that effort, and would let students explore more. It should be a way of helping students, not an easy way out.

- Justin wonders if it would be feasible to have alumni participation on some level. They could provide a unique perspective and background experiences. Steve could see this, the problem being that things change, and that the alumni would have to be keeping up.
- Will says that the academic philosophy seems to have shifted since the '70's and '80's. There have been huge changes: we have moved away from a plus/minus system to one where there are tons of delineations within the grading system (plusses and minuses on letters affect GPA, for example). Steve says that he hasn't been here long enough to detect that there is indication of changing these policies. It is interesting to wonder why it has gotten like this. One thing that they do need to consider is competition. Bowdoin became aware of how it needed to compete with other colleges. The alternative is risky: creating an identity around a difference in how you educate students. At some point the leadership decided not to take this approach.
- Kata says that the role of an advisor hasn't been defined. The expectations are different from each perspective. Steve says that this is absolutely right. There are two sides. You need to educate students about how to take advising. The other side is talking to faculty about how they advise. Faculty feels pressure from all different areas, and advising is lower priority. He would like to provide faculty with more assistance in advising. He was shocked at the information that the advisors get: 40 pages of different-colored paper. If he has to weigh through these, it's a disincentive. Making this digestible would be a big step. He was told not to use the word "train" in dealing with faculty, though. Kata asks if there is a definition of an advisor. Steve says that the tag is that it is an *academic* advisor. He thinks that a good advisor is acutely observant. Some faculty just don't want to deal with issues, but they shouldn't ignore them.
- Clark was interested by what they said at Brown about requirements: it wasn't important about what classes you took, just that you learned how to learn. He doesn't think that Bowdoin's route of being more competitive is in line with student interests and making sure that students learn how to learn. Steve thinks that Bowdoin's route structures teaching students to learn. At Brown there was agency with the students in learning how to learn. Looking at this, they see that students do explore departments and find focus, just as if a structured requirements system were in place. Also, professors end up with students in their classes that want to be there. Sounds like a dream.

VII. Old Business

Dooley says that Snapbands are in, and distribution is on Friday. Sign up to sit at the dining halls.

- a. Language Tapes: Sam says that this is the same bill from last week. The LMC has enthusiastically agreed to sponsor the tapes. This is just saying that we like this. We don't need to contribute any money. Those in favor: unanimous
 - b. Arabic Study: Let's talk about Arabic so it doesn't ruin Dustin's day tomorrow. Sam says that this is the same as last week. It just says that we encourage the college should look at different means of supporting language.
- Dooley asks what the next step is if we pass this. Sam D says that we should then talk to the deans about following up. Dustin says that this would be the position that BSG takes when he has conversations with administrators. It's a commitment. Dan asks if there is precedent for this kind of statement. Yes. We do this.
- Rutledge asks if there is the possibility of making outside studies eligible for fulfilling a distribution requirement. Sam says no, not really...they need to be met by college courses.
- Will generally supports this because it clearly outlines that we acknowledge the problems with the issues. We are sensitive to their concerns but indicate a direction we'd like them to take.
- Dennis says that in presenting this, we should say that we'd rather have a professor. We want to support the sustainability of this, and we want it to be attractive to students.
- Alison adds that the resolution that we just agreed to support is a step in showing student interest. If students rent these tapes, it is proof that there is interest.
- Clark says that this is a good bill. He hesitates to say that we require a professorship. It should be left vague and not be bogged down by specific details.
- Darren says that he got a positive sense of this issue from Dean Cornish, that they are looking for a solution. These are positive steps.
- Bryce would like to put in "professor," at least as an ultimate goal or that we encourage it.
- Clark thinks that it's important to take baby steps. When we've tried to leap and bound, we sometimes trip and fall. This is a step that way anyway. We could push later.
- Dennis falls in the middle. Maybe the responsibility for pushing a professorship lies with Dustin and doesn't need to be in the bill.
- Sam D echoes this. Our intentions are clear with this bill, and prescribing a certain action could backfire.
- Sam S says that the thing with "instruction" is vague. It could be talking about the tapes.
- Kristen says that having Dustin and Sam as spokespeople takes care of this.
- Ben L says that at most add "formal instruction," but he likes it as is.
- Those in favor of amendment to add something about a professorship: Ben F; Those opposed: everyone except Sam S, who sustains because she likes "formal", Bryce because he proposed to amendment, and Rutledge because he hasn't abstained before.

- Sam K wants to replace “seriously consider“ to “address“.
- Sam D indicates that it would be nice to get these suggestions before the meeting in the future.
- Those in favor of Sam K’s amendment: everyone but Will, Kata, and Darren, who are opposed. Dooley abstains because this is nitpicking. At this point, there is mass confusion. Many People failed to vote for or against, and maintain that they are not abstaining. Dustin goes on a short but intense tirade concerning the remedial concept of how voting works.
- Dennis wants to change “is possible“ to “might not be possible“. There is unorganized yelling about the philosophy of “impossibility“ and the differences between something being impossible and not possible.
- Sam S agrees because of the last line. We need to take a stance.
- Ben F preaches that these issues of semantics matter. Try to take them seriously. This comment says everything about Ben’s BSG experience.
- Will agrees that words matter but thinks that if people saw how fucking ridiculous these conversations have become, no one could take them seriously. This proposal has been up for two weeks and we should be spending time outside of these meetings with these kinds of issues. This is not the venue to address them.
- Clark says that the “is impossible“ part is a formal program of department, but that the ideal goal in the near future is instruction.
- Vote on amendment to change “is impossible“ to “might not be possible“. Those in favor: Rutledge, Dennis, Nicole, Ben, Sam S, Sam, Liza, Hannah. Everyone else is opposed except Alison, who abstains because she doesn’t see much of a difference. Motion fails
- Vote on bill: unanimously in favor
 - c. Language Instruction: Sam introduces the next bill, regarding funding of academic instruction. If we make this statement, it is the start of dialogue.
- Ben F would vote no at this point, not because he disagrees with the idea, but because nothing will happen to these clubs if we pass this. He motions to table this. Those in favor: Ben, Sam K; Those opposed: everyone else; Jess is confused and is counted as an abstention.

Those in favor of not adjourning: 13; Those opposed (Which means the meeting does adjourn): 7; Clark abstains for conflict of interest. Motion to extend the meeting past 10:00 fails.

VIII. Adjournment at 10:02 pm