

Bowdoin Student Government

BOWDOIN COLLEGE

Meeting of the **Bowdoin Student Government**

20 Feb. 2008

- I. **Call to Order** at 8:33 p.m.
- II. **Roll Call:** Nicole Willey, Ben Lehay (arrives late), and Sam Kamin are absent.
- III. **President's Welcome:** Dustin asks the group to welcome Greg, the last new member. We are back to full strength. Tonight is a busy night. There is automatic adjournment at 10, which BSG can decide to suspend or not. There are several guests at the assembly meeting. There are three Orient reporters and two people from the Will Hales commission (including Will Hales himself). Tim Foster is here, as is Paul Switter, student body president from Bates.
- IV. **Approval of the Minutes:** Let's look over the minutes. Lindsey wants her name spelling changed on pg. 5. Move to approve the minutes. Minutes are approved unanimously.
- V. **Discussion with Tim Foster:** Dustin says that Tim Foster is here to talk about the hazing policy. This time is to talk about the policy included at the end of the packet. We can also mention the document we wrote up last semester as well.

Tim Foster thanks everyone for letting him come. The document is a response to the investigations of last semester. There was an understanding and a feeling that the small reference to hazing in the handbook was inadequate. Hazing was included as "conduct unbecoming of a Bowdoin student". There may have been a feeling that when the college disbanded fraternities, hazing would discontinue. Hazing happens with or without fraternities, though, in a number of contexts. It can happen in a number of organizations. It happens in religious organizations, athletic teams, etc. We felt that it would be prudent to develop a policy (not a Draconian one, however) that was clear in our expectations but was written in a way that would value some components associated with hazing. There is a way to bond that is appropriate. It isn't just a "thou shalt not" policy. It has been kicked around by the Student Affairs Committee for a while now. He wants to listen to reactions, after which it will undergo more revisions. He will also share this with athletic leaders and organizations advisors. After final revisions, it will go back to Student Affairs, who will take one last pass. Tim will then take it to the President to be included in the code. There is a separate list of policies, and this would be added as a stand-alone policy in the same way that the ResLife policies, the alcohol policies, and other are. It speaks for itself, and he's here to listen to thoughts.

 - Sam D says that after reading this, there is still no sense of what hazing is. He wouldn't know where to draw the line between hazing and something that is acceptable.

- Will's committee had the same issue. The problem was that there is too much verbiage. It's hard to sift through the policy. We need to say "hazing isn't acceptable and Bowdoin," and start with that. We realize that intention is to leave this to interpretation, but it could use a few more concrete statements.
- Alison says that it is important that this doesn't stand alone. If it is followed by presentations in Orientation or other things, these would be valuable supplements. A lot of people don't read the handbook carefully. Tim responds that the policy is one piece of what needs to occur. There is an education component that needs to be active as well.
- Sophia says that one strength of the document is that it gives both positive and negative definitions, and that is something that should stay in the document. It helps in defining hazing concretely.
- Dan L asks about how this document will be used in practice. Tim says that it is imbedded now, and the hope is that this will provide more definition. It would create a common understanding in the community that could be a vehicle for coaches, advisors, and deans to make solid statements about standards and expectations. He hasn't had conversations yet (about non-student hazing), but he realizes that it could happen. This becomes a touch-point. If there is a serious incident and something is brought forward, then there is something to use as a yardstick.
- James likes the philosophical background. His concern is in regard to the level of coercion and opting-out issues. There is often a fine line between a party and organized hazing. You could suggest a mechanism that allows people to opt out, which would alleviate the concern of peer pressure to some extent. If there were some protocol, like issuing a statement that people are told that they won't be forced to do anything, they could point to this. They could show that they took steps to allow people to opt out. Tim says that the coercion piece is critical. People can be given the opportunity to opt out, but choose not to. This can still constitute hazing, because these decisions are not easy to make in the situation. He gives an example of the mental process involved in this decision. This is a sensitive issue.
- Leah says that a problem that she has is in the statement "regardless of a person's willingness to participate." Improv, for example, did an initiation skit, and they all agreed to do it. Analyzing from the outside is hard. This line is troubling. Tim says to suppose that a team (he is citing an actual incident) says that they volunteered to run naked through the women's locker room holding each other in a suggestive place. Everyone on the team said that they were willing. Is that okay? Leah thinks that the part of the objective-average-person stipulation covers extreme cases like this. Tim asks if first-year players are being hazed when they carry bottles and balls to practice. In Yarmouth, this constitutes hazing. There need to be some judgments about the seriousness of what's happening. One key thing that we came to an agreement about is in addressing coaches. He tells the story of a soccer player who went to her coach about what these practices mean about the team that it will be. There needs to be some flexibility about how these things are handled. He talks about extreme examples like branding people and sodomy.
- Rutledge is going to agree with Leah about the willingness to participate. He thinks it is okay for the guys to run through the locker room holding each others' nuts if they all agreed to partake. If they were given an out and they wanted to do it, it's okay. He

doesn't think that Bowdoin has a hazing problem, because there is not dangerous stuff going on. A lot of times hazing is exactly about mutual respect. It's all the more real and makes connections that much more authentic and less artificial. He thinks that we need to look at people's willingness to participate because it's wrong if Bowdoin targets people if everyone involved wanted to take those actions. Bowdoin is a touchy-feely college and is very sensitive. What makes one person uncomfortable may not make the next person uncomfortable. If everyone wants to participate, then no one gets hurt. Tim says that this is why we need to do education on this topic. He asks the room to vote by a show of hands whether or not the nut-grabbing qualifies as hazing. A number of people raise their hands, including Rutledge. He says that it is hazing, but if people agree, then it's not wrong. Tim agrees that there are different levels of responsibility, but that incident would be seen as hazing by the state of Maine. He cites an example of teams getting shut down in Maine last year. There has to be an ability to look at individual situations in a place that is, as Bowdoin is, intimate. Also, what is the proper body to hear this? More serious situations are handled by the Judicial Board. In the situation of last semester, there was a lot of drinking, exotic dancing, and costuming. We would call this moderate to mild hazing. You could envision things that are much more serious. There is potential for serious hazing, and we have to be mindful of it. Education is huge.

- Dan H says that there should be a clause about what would be received as more serious cases. He likes including parts about traditions.
- Justin wonders what is acceptable for promoting team bonding. It is important to say what can be done. Tim says that they talked about it as a committee. It's tricky, because a number of things could be both acceptable and unacceptable. They included 3-4 examples somewhere.
- Greg asks if there is room to include that long-standing traditions done in the spirit of continuity are okay. He also wonders what the purpose of this is. People know that doing something wrong to a fellow student will get you in trouble. Tim says that the purpose is to create a common understanding about what constitutes hazing. People from outside of Bowdoin would press us on what we are saying here about hazing.
- Amir thinks that just because a group of people agree on an activity, it doesn't make it right. We are saying as a whole school that things are acceptable or not. There are certain boundaries that can't be crossed regardless of tradition or consent. What Rutledge talked about would be crossing that boundary.
- Alison agrees that there is a sliding scale. We need to keep in mind that someone's willingness may not be a true willingness. She can guarantee that one or two people did it because they thought they would be ostracized.
- Sophia says that Tim referenced Maine State Law. If there could be a clear reference to this in the document, it would be helpful. In her interpretation of hazing, there is an undercurrent on admission being contingent on the activity. Some teams do this bonding when the season is almost over. This is different than associating the activities with entry.
- John looked up the Maine law last night, and it seems only to address public institutions. Tim says that this is a point of discussion right now. There was a later statement that might change this stipulation. The attorney is checking on this. Also, John says that the document says that hazing is "premeditated". He thinks that hazing

could be spontaneous, and people could use this to argue that because an activity was not planned in advance, it was not hazing.

- Bryce says that he thinks that we need more education in terms of opting out. He thinks that we are at an institution where we should all be questioning group activity. Nobody should go along with the flow just to fit in. We should be working toward that. We should know that we can set up situations so that people can opt out of. Maybe a workshop for people to go through would enforce this. He also says that in almost any institution, there are those that are new that are doing things that other people don't want to do. Getting water or balls is almost part of the process of rising; a training, if you will. Tim agrees, and doesn't necessarily think that the ball-carrying is hazing. It's about different roles and responsibilities.
- Kyle wonders if there is concern that this could result in more dangerous situations. This might drive hazing off-campus, because hazing couldn't be extinguished immediately. He mentions that most hazing involves consumption of alcohol, and he could see that people might be afraid to call security because of fear of punishment. Tim says that this is an interesting point. There is the whole dilemma: how big of an issue is this? He doesn't think that we have a huge problem, but we should be talking about this issue. He doesn't see children making those kinds of decisions.
- Liza is glad that this document doesn't mention alcohol. The line that the speaker drew seemed wrong to her. Liza thinks that people have this fear that group activities will be extinguished as a result of this. Maybe include that hazing is not necessarily all group activities. A positive general statement might cover this well. It would allow traditions.
- Leah doesn't think that the willingness to participate is necessary. The physical and psychological discomfort is enough to cover problems.
- Kata thinks that it is important to pair types of hazing with punishment. There should be limits as to what punishments the J-Board or the office issue. There needs to be concrete information about what punishments apply to what activities.
- Rutledge says that an artificial precedence needs to be created. Kids aren't being that creative, and we could make a list of what could happen and what punishment could be. Maybe administration could work with club president to list acceptable activities. Hazing legislature is going to be a major concern, and we don't want to get rid of positive activities. He reiterates what Kyle said and compares it to the hard-liquor policy.
- Sam D says that the club membership activities policy that the BSG drafted lays out a lot of affirmative practices that would be a good guideline. Dustin says that he agrees with Sam. He likes the document that we put together.
- Greg wonders if there could be a panel of peers to judge cases of hazing. Rutledge thinks that this is good, because people on the J-Board don't understand teams and sports. Alison reminds us that the people on the J-Board aren't crazy and dislocated. Will H says that Kyle can speak to the mentality involved in selection of candidates. Kyle says that if he were involved in a case of hazing (which he hopes he never is), he would be completely at ease with the J-Board handling his case. They are a pretty good gauge of what college life should be like.
- Greg isn't saying that the J-Board sits around knitting, but it would be beneficial if activities could establish their own policies. Tim says that this is problematic. They

could deem something okay that is a serious problem. There are captain's councils, like on the hockey team. Tim thinks that this may happen already.

- Dustin says that it would be helpful to boil this down into three bold lines. This is a lot to read. Also, it would be good to designate whom to ask about activities and make sure that there is a level of confidentiality established. Thanks for coming, this was great.

VI. Discussion with Will Hales: Will H isn't going to read through the whole document. We should focus on responses and reactions. As far as process for BSG appointments, the interviews function reasonably well. One concern is that the spots on the committees aren't necessarily being filled by people who want to serve without being on BSG. This could be a good opportunity for students who don't necessarily get involved. These spots are a good resource to get input from a lot of places. Timelines for elections seem just fine. What bothered the group were freshman elections. It's hard without knowing anybody. It's more of a popularity contest than anything else. We feel that pushing back freshman elections would be helpful. Also, giving the opportunity to see what BSG does would be good. How much understanding do first-years have about the roles when the year starts? Candidacy and campaigning: What does the BSG do? What do the positions do? We recommend axing the requirement for signatures. Who denies signatures? This seems like an arbitrary obstacle. You should really look for students with interest. People have an interest in knowing more about what a candidate offers. The blurbs that the Orient runs are popular.

- Greg asks if there was talk of debates. Will H says that BSG should look into this. Maybe utilizing BCN or Facebook would be helpful. Houston Kraft's youtube video was all over the place. Just let people know more about what you can offer.

Will continues that technically, voting works well. Perhaps it could be held over a longer window. It may increase turnout, but elections look good from the IT perspective. We just want to make sure that this is sustainable after Will D graduates. John assured him that they will function. The system should stay as it is. People just need to be engaged.

For the main event: who should be eligible. We recommend removing the stipulation that the BSG President has been a member. For the past few years, BSG presidents have run unopposed. The commission talked about BSG's perception in the campus at large. It should be a big concern. The commission was all non-BSG members, and the meetings got cynical. People don't necessarily feel that the body is as tapped-in as it should be. It seems like an incestuous clique. There is an awkward aside concerning the spelling of Afterward. Not having prior experience does not mean that someone can't do the job. He understands that this is a demanding job, but thinks that the more competition, the better. It would improve the perception of the group. He thinks that we all agree that the student body should be trusted to discern whether or not experience plays a role. This would be a selling point for a candidacy.

- Rutledge was pleased that the concern with the timeline for first-year elections is there. Is this talking about class officers as well? He says that members of the BSG could be responsible for getting out ideas to help first-year programming. Elections second

semester could establish better officers. Also, maybe Dustin could write a debrief about his time as President to get inside info for coming Presidents. Dustin says that were that to change, they would have to arrange something.

- Sam D says that elections can be a popularity contest. It is easy for this to happen. How did the committee talk about this? Will H says that the signatures aren't really part that discussion. They think that it is hard to get people involved. As far as measures to increase student involvement and improve perceptions, they recommend fewer vetting processes.
- Dan H doesn't know that much about BSG, but wonders about ways to remove people from office. What if they had someone who could not function? It happens sometimes in the IHC, and it seems like it would be a big concern in BSG. Is there a clause for the BSG or the student body to remove people if they don't hold up their end of the job? Dustin says that it's a 2/3 vote to remove a member. To get rid of all 7 officers, you can get signatures and votes from half the campus. This process needs to be revisited.
- Jess says that it is hard to define positions. She didn't know coming in that she would be assigned to committees and everything. It would be better for BSG to have a plan that distributes members to committees. Also, how about moving elections to fall so that incoming freshman can vote? Will H says that the problem is that freshman don't have an informed vote at that early point. The rationale for having the seniors not vote is that seniors won't be represented by the body of the next year. Logistically, moving elections to the fall would be hard because there is a great deal of work done over the summer. Jess wonders if it would be possible to have an executive board over the summer. Dustin says that it would be possible but extremely hard. They do a lot of work in the spring. Even getting started in August, it would be hard to get a person where they need to be in terms of relationships with administrators.
- James wonders if there is desire for more elected positions. Will H doesn't think so. When he read that new positions were being created, it felt like increasing the bureaucracy. He thinks that the focus needs to be on increasing interest in the positions that are there and the knowledge about offerings.
- Rutledge says that getting signatures is a legitimate way to get your name out there and start initial support. It's a physical action that starts the process of campaigning.
- Will D asks if they discussed the treasurer. Will H says not specifically. Will D talks about combating the perception of BSG. There is the preconceived notion of student government in high school. How do we combat that? There is also the divide between class officers and the assembly itself. Will H says that most people commented about BSG and not class reps and officer teams. He thinks that BSG should encourage changing how the group is seen. The body does have an effect on student life, but the relationship between BSG and the student is misunderstood. Having a more active relationship with freshman might improve mindset from the start.
- Justin wouldn't be opposed to moving elections back a few weeks. They could have time to set the platform for what BSG does. Having someone to come to and relate to as a first year is important: first-years approached him because they knew he was in BSG. Will H thinks that this is an important development, because it wasn't like that his first year.

- Rutledge says to imagine that all the people who expressed interest had to come to meetings and create a legitimate race. That would really get the best candidates. Will H says that in talking about perception and engagement, first-years were the best-represented class. Seniors have a harder time filling spots, and first-years have more candidates. Involvement declines over the four years. Will H wants the record to show that Mara Cooper was a member of the Commission as well. Thank you, Will Hales and company.

VII. New Business

- a. **Movie Tickets Funding Request:** Dooley compares this to the church pre-Martin Luther because of all the over-indulgences. There is a motion to vote on this request tonight. The motion passes. Dooley spits out something about movie tickets. Funding passes: Those in approval: everyone except for Lindsey, who abstains.
- b. **Watson Gym Magazine Funding Request:** Dooley mentions the magazine subscriptions for the gym. There was a popular survey so that they knew the top five: Cosmo, Time, Newsweek, People, and something else. It depends on how cheap he can get the magazines and how much money he gets. Voting tonight passes. Those in favor: unanimous.

Kyle motions to extend the automatic adjournment so as to meet 10 minutes longer. Motion is approved.

- c. **Block Party Funding Request:** Dan passes this to Isa and Sam Scully. Sam says that the Block Party will be happening toward the end of the semester. It is an outside-themed event followed by a concert. They want Bowdoin performance teams to open to Lupe Fiasco. It would end with a party. This document about what a Block Party means. There will be a potluck. It's about bringing student groups together. They chose Lupe Fiasco because he was one of the top choices for Ivies. He has a very positive message. Isa says that Lupe Fiasco is up in the air. Kate says that he's not available for any of the dates that they requested. Lupe is off the list for right now. They still need funding for parts A and C of the event.
 - James wonders if they would still charge tickets without Lupe. Isa says that it depends on who they get.
 - Dan L says that this is obviously a big event. We need to think about what role the BSG is playing in this? Whose event is this?
 - Kyle asks how much money we have. Dustin says around \$6500 dollars. This would be about a third of what we have.
 - Rutledge wants to tell Sam and Isa that they should look into Soul Cannon, who played in the pub, at Helmreich, and at an apartment. They are cheap and awesome. He is interested in the historical perspective. It should be "decades" instead of "centuries".
 - Lindsey wonders about the date, which is during Ivies. They are actually looking at the week after that.
 - Jess thinks that this is a really good idea. She thinks of a week of drinking when she thinks of Ivies. This is trying to promote togetherness, and this would be a great

solution that isn't limited to Howell House parties. Sam says that this is about embracing the entire campus.

- Bryce says that we will talk about this next week. Isa says that this is all evolving. Bryce would like to see this more fleshed out.
- Sam D thinks that coming in the wake of Ivies, this won't be all that successful. This is also in the shadow of the spring formal and right before finals. This might be great for the fall. Sam S says that the aura of Ivies is alcohol, and there's nothing wrong with another outside event to pull people together.
- Dan L says that they have only been working on this for 2 or 3 days. This is very much evolving. If people have thoughts, email them and keep in mind that this would be our big programming event of the semester. It is a huge commitment. Dustin says that student affairs will meet about it next week.

VIII. Adjournment at 10:10 p.m.