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SGA tackles restructuring

By Lauren Packer
editor-in-chief

Clubs and organizations funded by Student Government Association have been restructured to ensure better representation, a problem that has previously plagued SGA.

The 2003-2004 Club and Organization Directory lists seven groupings of clubs: Academic, Art, Interfraternity/Panhellenic, Multi-Cultural, Recreation, Service and Honors, and Student Life. Along the lines of these groupings eight councils were formed for the 86 total clubs and organizations to be recognized by SGA.

The reason for the new structure stems from a committee started in the spring of 2003, under then SGA President Brandi Hovis. This committee was responsible for drawing up the structure and rewriting the constitution.

Current SGA President Scott Soltis was a member of the initial committee and is now charged with implementing the new structure.

"The old system was antiquated and needed a change," Soltis said.

Under the old system, clubs were not being fairly represented, if represented at all. Of the 86 clubs, the only ones with direct representation and a vote at SGA meetings were the Multi-Cultural Council, Lion Entertainment Board, Joint Residence Council, Commuter Council, Interfraternity Council, and Panhellenic Council. Of these six clubs, only three (IFC, PHC, MCC) represented multiple clubs. The SGA Senators were

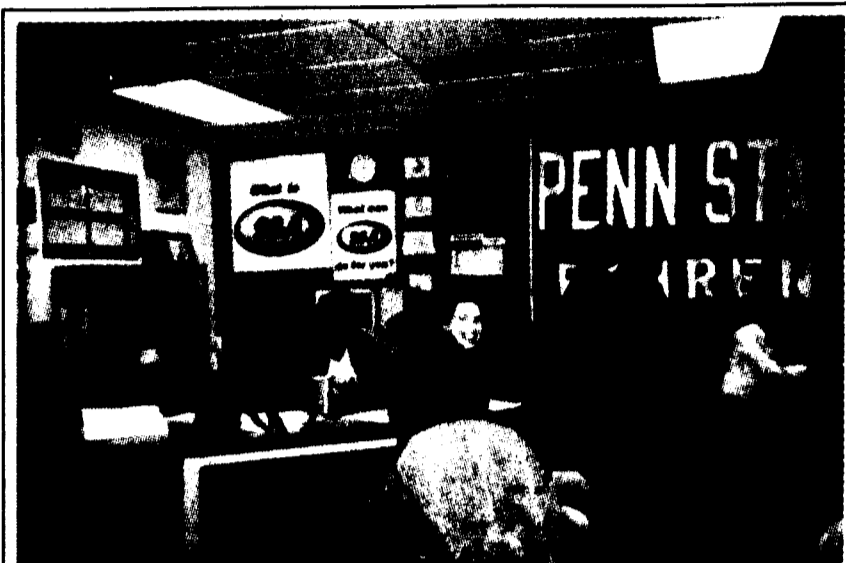


PHOTO COURTESY OF SGA ARCHIVES
Members of the Student Government Association pause for a moment while hard at work in their office, located in the lower level of the Reed Building.

"It's only fair that if one group of clubs had direct representation, then another group should as well. What's fair for one person should be fair for another."

-Scott Soltis, SGA President

responsible for representing the remaining 65 clubs. This sheer number of clubs that fell into the Senator's laps helped lead to the unfair representation.

"Some senators did a great job representing their clubs and

organizations. Others did not view it as a priority," Soltis said.

"It's only fair that if one group of clubs had direct representation, then another group should as well. What's fair for one person should be fair for another."

Soltis and Vice-President Jenn Sutter have been working hard to bring equality in club and organization representation.

Last semester, a representative from all 86 clubs and organizations were invited to meet with Soltis and Sutter (as well as the rest of the committee) to discuss and clarify any questions about the new structure and format. Unfortunately, less than half of the clubs took advantage of this meeting. This year, an SGA retreat weekend is planned for September 12-13 to explain the new process to all members of SGA. This should help spread knowledge of the new structure.

"It's a new process, so a lot of work has to be done by everyone to get it up and running smoothly," Soltis said.

Sutter agrees.

"There's still some confusion, but it will be clarified the weekend of the retreat. Every SGA member will know so much about these councils that they will feel like they created them," she said. The new system requires a great deal of cooperation from both the clubs and organizations as well as the Senators and SGA.

Now, Senators are assigned to act as liaisons to each of the five new councils. The Senators no longer directly represent a set of clubs and organizations. The Senators are there to ensure that the concerns of all students are represented, not just those in clubs.

The councils have weekly meetings in which all clubs listed under that council discuss concerns. The councils are set up with an executive board, consisting

of a president, vice-president, secretary and a council representative. The information from these meetings then makes its way to the SGA meeting via the council representative. The primary responsibility of the council representative is to attend SGA meetings. Each of the eight council representatives is allowed one vote.

Sutter points out that the new system has many advantages over the old system.

"Bringing together these clubs helps to share information with SGA," Sutter said.

"It makes the smaller clubs feel more in tune with what's going on. It also helps for programming. By grouping these clubs and organizations together in similar categories, we're hoping to see them come together and function as a larger unit."

One of the issues that face Behrend students is the overwhelming number of programs with sparse attendance. While quantity is sometimes a good thing, Sutter is hoping for more quality as well.

"We want to see quality programs, not just quantity. Larger, more group-oriented programs allow for more people, both club members and non-club members, to attend," said Sutter.

"I've said all along, this is going to take hard work, patience and understanding from everyone. SGA will do everything in our power to get people informed," he said.

No vacancy Unprecedented housing crunch felt at Behrend

By Justin Curry
news editor

On-campus residents had quite the surprise awaiting them this year upon their return to school. Most were expecting to walk in their dorm rooms and greet their new roommates, and some were thoroughly shocked to find that they were tripled or quadrupled up, living with double the number of people that they had expected to. A select few were even more surprised to find themselves living in supplemental housing, makeshift housing that was erected in study lounges and residence hall basements across campus. Not since the 1991 school year has Behrend seen such a shortage in housing, and steps are being taken to prevent another situation like this from happening again.

According to Ken Miller, Director of Student Affairs, the normal cancellation rate of housing contracts for Behrend is 22.5 percent by the beginning of an academic year. During the summer, the housing and student affairs staff noticed an anomaly taking place. Instead of numbers reaching the 22percent mark, they were only reaching about 18percent. In a last-ditch effort to stop a housing shortage, no more contracts were offered after the decrease in cancellations was noticed. It obviously didn't work.

Housing and Food Services intentionally overbooks housing contracts, with the idea that after cancellations, there will still be room for a few late-filing students.

"We didn't offer any more contracts this year than we did last year, it was just that students weren't canceling like they normally do," Miller told the Beacon. "And when it comes to housing, there isn't any room for a margin of error." Normally, H&FS can count on anywhere from fifteen to twenty cancellations on opening weekend, this year a total of eight occurred.



PHOTO BY JUSTIN CURRY
Serania Naef (Third Semester Psych), Lauren Fehl (First Semester, DUS) and Bernie Krod (Third Semester, Finance) show the Beacon staff their close quarters made in a study lounge in Niagara Hall.

"We never thought we'd be living like this. Seriously, the guys floor is right outside our door. What happened?"

-Serania Naef, Lauren Fehl and Bernie Krod, commenting on their supplemental housing

Yet another difference that took place this year due to the overbooking in housing was the fact that some students were roomed with resident assistants on their floors. As of this week, all of the students rooming with male RAs had been moved to other rooms, but the female RA situation was still in limbo.

"It's uncertain as to whether or not this problem will be fixed by the end of the semester. We are in the plans of working to compensate the RAs who were given roommates," stated Miller. A perk generally granted to resident assistants is their own room, and this year it wasn't able to happen for all of them.

When asked if he thought the situation this year with resident assistants would affect recruiting RAs for next year, Miller said "We don't make a habit of doing this from year to year, and we definitely don't want to start setting this precedent. I sincerely hope that recruitment doesn't drop for next year as a result of the housing situation."

Some much-needed relief is on the way for next year. Senat Hall, the new residence hall located between Perry Hall and Reed will be open for the beginning of the 2004-05 school year. This hall will house 149 students, as well as the new ID+ and Housing and Food Services offices. The department of student affairs hopes that with one hundred and forty nine new beds opening on campus, housing will become more marketable to students. Also in the works are plans for a new residence hall to be located in upper campus near Almy and Ohio Halls. Tripp Hall is still in the beginning phases, with no definite start date set yet.

"We definitely won't be overbooking next year like we did this year. This is not something we want happening on a yearly basis," ended Miller.

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