

Student Council Refugee:

Making the worst of a bad situation

• An Insider's Look at Council at Their Worst •

By Zack Ordynans, 1996-97 Junior Class Representative and Budget Committee member

For all I care, for all the good it'll do us, Student Council can just go dissolve. It can evaporate. If it ceased to exist, I couldn't be any happier. And the student body couldn't be any better off...

I remember some advice that I was given back when I was a freshman. Andy Sweet, who was a Junior and the president of a new organization called ROCU, was trying to explain his frustration with Clark. He was fed up with the administration, who justify their job titles with attempts to bureaucratize everything to the point that nothing can ever get done; he was upset with many of his fellow students, who were either too apathetic or naive to care about trying to accomplish anything greater than booking The Dave Matthews Band; and, finally, he was sick of a Student Council that was full of people who were looking to pad their resumes and increase their odds of getting into G&P.

About a year later, John Spelman wrote a short article (*WheatBread* #4) articulating his displeasure with his time in Student Council. I still didn't quite understand. I couldn't believe that things were that bad. And looking back three years later, I was right, things really aren't that bad. They're worse.

By the beginning of my Junior year, I was upset about a lot of things that were happening at this school and I was still optimistic about my chances of improving things. Armed with naivety and a few spare hours on Sunday night,

I thought I'd give council a shot. I ran unopposed (see *WB* #6) and won the Junior Class Representative position. I joined the budget committee, regarding that committee to be the only reason that council even exists (don't let anyone try to disagree; council was only created to distribute money, and this remains the only area in which council has any real power).

I haven't wasted so much time on such a futile cause since high school French class. I sat through a year of council that was most notable for some overrated and overblown struggle over 1-800 phone calls that probably added up to a combined savings of about two bucks for the whole campus. And that wild achievement took place before my session even began.

And then there's the budget committee—a crack commando unit lead into action each week by the dynamic Rob Leeman (who is apparently convinced that the eighties are already eligible as an object of fashion nostalgia). No matter what else is said about Rob, it is important to keep in mind that he is a very nervous person. Personally, I never had much of a problem with Rob, and he put an undeniable amount of work into his position as the committee chair. It was a few of his opinions, especially during the budget process, that I had a problem with.

I took issue with the fact that Leeman chose to pad the committee with Rep. Mitchell (his girlfriend, no less) and Ian Newton, who was somehow elected Secretary. I was upset about the fact that Leeman aimed at cutting organizations, but didn't have the heart to cut the groups that his friends were involved in. Witness the fact that PEC, Speaker's Forum, and

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CUFS all received substantial cuts (14, 13, and 35 percent, respectively) while SAB received a ten thousand dollar (20 percent) increase* in spite of little justification. Newman was given money to go to a Red Sox game, while *Wheat Bread* was cut by 32 percent and *The Scarlet* by 27 percent.

By the end of the academic year, I was as fed up with council and this school as any of my ideological predecessors. I walked out of the last meeting of the semester, barely restraining myself from repeating Spelman's feat of resigning from Council in the middle of a meeting. I wanted to resign, but I figured that the summer break would be enough time to cool off and that I would be ready to return to the fray in the fall.

Then fall arrived... and I was still pissed. In the time since last year's final meeting, the new president (an unlikely character named Casey Frantz) has resigned for a reason that is at best unconfirmed. SuZanne "Botta" Botta, the recently elected vice president who came to the position without any prior council experience, took over as acting President. And in lesser news, Leeman also resigned for unknown reasons late last year.

Frantz's absence, and the resulting miscommunication that followed, combined with Leeman's resignation and the graduation of Senior Class Rep. Leah Camposeo to leave council in a very vulnerable position. Council was so vulnerable, in fact, that an absence or two at each meeting would have been the difference between a (by previous standards) reasonably functioning council and a completely ineffectual weekly "social gathering."

I decided that by not showing up to any meetings for the rest of my term I would be performing a greater duty to this campus than I

*Despite my objection, the budget committee voted to grant SAB a \$6K increase (to \$46,000 for the 97-98 academic year). When objections to this increase were raised in full council, they voted to grant SAB an additional \$4K.

ever could have by granting this worthless council my valuable presence (value, of course being considered in this context as a relative term; watching paint dry would have been higher in value than wasting any more of my time with this Student Council). And I decided to do what I could to talk other disgruntled members out of going to meetings.

Student Council did not meet its quorum (7 members in attendance, the minimum required to call a meeting to order) for the first two meetings this year. At the third meeting of the year, quorum was met for the first time and SAB was given another \$500, to help clean up after the accident that was Fall Fest.

After the following week's meeting I received a phone call from Chris Condon, now representing *The Scarlet*. He asked me if I knew if I was still a member of council. Apparently someone from council called *The Scarlet* and told them that I would be impeached at that night's meeting. After the meeting, *The Scarlet* received another call from an unknown council Representative, reportedly saying that "If you publish the information that I gave you earlier, it would be incorrect."

Now Chris was on the phone with me, trying to figure out what was going on. "Did they get quorum tonight?" I asked.

"That's it," Chris answered. "They must have not gotten quorum." They couldn't impeach me for absences because there weren't enough people there. The irony was terrific.

Despite my best efforts, that situation didn't continue very long. The next meeting, on Sunday, September 28 was a return to quorum and the end of my run in Student Council. I was impeached on the last meeting of my session, for all the good it did them.

They're lucky they made quorum at all— if they hadn't, they wouldn't have been able to ratify the results from last week's representative elections. Practically, this would have meant that the outgoing reps. would have been forced to meet every week until they met quorum. The new session would not have been able to start

until this took place, until the election results were passed in an official meeting.

If you, as the reader of this article, are merely a casual observer of the Clark political scene (such as it is), you might be asking yourself what I hoped to accomplish through this counter-productive strategy. To be honest with you it's a hard thing to define. I was trying to be politically active in the way that made the most sense at the moment, and this was what I came up with. I've become bitter and jaded and can no longer remember why I thought Student Council had any worth to this campus. Council or, at the very least, last year's session of council, was no longer worth my time.

My advice to the enthusiastic new reps: be careful about who you give money to. Think about where the money is going and question the importance of spending money for that purpose. Think about how much money groups have already been given in their budget, and be sure to account for how much money certain groups need to even function (as opposed to groups that spend money on things that they would *like*). It's all right to say "no" when a group asks for \$499 worth of helium balloons. Try to be more generous to smaller groups (with tighter budgets) than you are to groups that were already given \$30,000. And stop sending groups to conferences— it's

usually very expensive and in most cases not worth the money.

One more thing: before you give any more money to SAB, and when their budget comes up next year, think about the fact that the Saturday Fall Fest concert cost \$6,000 and was only attended by about 100 people, which works out to a cost of about \$60 per person there. Or if you'd rather look at the total SAF, this concert cost every student that pays the activities fee about \$4, whether or not they had any desire to see Jiggle the Handle again.

I don't mean to keep picking on SAB (I'm sure there must be a couple of people who appreciate what they're doing), but it seems to me that they've been treated unfairly— unfairly *well*, that is— by Student Council in the recent past. And come on now... have you seen the E-board meetings they have? They take themselves awfully seriously for a group that brags about having booked a Human Regurgitator. With all of the shit that Clark's administration talks, isn't a Human Regurgitator a bit of a redundancy?

As far as the recent Presidential election, I was rooting for Josh Duksin until the debate. Say what you will, but wouldn't he have at least made council meetings a whole lot easier to sit through? Wouldn't he have supplied *WheatBread* and *The Scarlet* with great quotes all year [see this issue's

cover story]? Didn't he campaign harder than anyone and use color in his posters? And wasn't he also the candidate most likely to have wrecked council beyond all recognition? These were all worthy reasons to vote for Josh. To o bad he showed up at the debate and reminded us all of what he was really all about.

And the other candidates? Kristen Chin was a senior science major whom other senior science majors didn't even know, and her anonymity wasn't helped by her absence at the debate. Rob Clark is a freshman with no idea about what's going on, and his campaign was hurt by the minor scandal surrounding his ridiculous posters and the subsequent apology letter. Damaris Gomez, who clearly won the debate and ran away with the election, should do an adequate job. But should Botta really be the person that she models herself after?

It's a shame that council is such a waste of time, because maybe if it weren't, some of the right people would end up running for office. It looks like all that we'll have in the meantime is a continuation of the Botta at hand, with no real solution in sight. I guess we can all content ourselves with knowing that we won't have to keep up with the stock market to find out how much money is left in the SAF. Sigh...

Here's to another great year of council!