

From: Radu, Joseph Traian (Joey)

Sent: Monday, February 14, 2011 9:05 PM

To: Collado, Shirley M.; Liebowitz, Ronald D.; Spears, Tim

Cc: McBride, Barbara J.; Price, Mari C.; Deacon, Penny; Mulligan, Lark; King, Virginia Elizabeth; Ray-Mazumder, Viveka; Kerr, Nathaniel Westlake (Nate)

Subject: Important Pre-Meeting Gender Council Update

Dear President Liebowitz, Vice President Spears, and Dean Collado,

We are writing this letter to you as representatives of the coalition behind the Gender Council proposal, in advance of our meeting with you on Tuesday. After our last few meetings with President Liebowitz, Dean Collado, and Community Council, we have some concerns about the direction this negotiation process is heading that we would like to share.

Since the genesis of this idea in November 2009, we have done our best to work openly and collaboratively with students, staff, faculty, and Administrators to craft a strong, democratic proposal reflective of the direct, lived experiences of the people we met with over the course of the past fourteen months.

In the spring of 2010, various meetings with Administrators produced support and advice that we gladly followed to enhance the goals driving our initiative. Then-Dean of the College Gus Jordan seemed to back our proposal wholeheartedly, but suggested we wait for the return of the Chief Diversity Officer in order to form the best council possible. Nevertheless, he and others gave us permission to send an all-campus e-mail on May 18, 2010, stating our intention to—"[w]ithin the first two weeks of fall classes"—"gather all interested individuals to discuss how best to structure this Council...[and] begin working as soon as possible on concrete policy initiatives." By the end of the school year (and after receiving several positive responses to the all-campus e-mail), we had the impression that because we had amassed such support from every level of the College, the Council would be assembled and functional by the beginning of Fall 2010.

When we returned for this academic year, we began meeting with Dean Collado immediately. Staying in constant communication with her and the rest of the supporters we had gathered up to that point, we continued to meet and gather additional feedback from various Administrators. Months passed, but—even after a contentious meeting with the staff and faculty involved in the Middlebury Inclusion Collective—we still believed the Council would be formed soon. We were anxious for the process to move forward but were keenly aware of the need to make our proposal as robust as possible.

Our thinking changed after two meetings with the Community Council on November 29, 2010, and January 17, 2011. After spending two different sessions explaining the need for this council, conveying the theories behind the structure, and troubleshooting questions, Community Council went into an executive session that ultimately produced a surprising resolution unreflective of our true goals.

In short, the process outlined to us by various representatives of the Administration—followed doggedly over the course of a year—has failed to produce what we had been led to believe would be the product of our efforts. The proposal has not been improved, or even substantially changed, but much time has elapsed in which we and the other sixty individuals behind us could by now have at least begun work on and possibly even completed many of the tasks outlined in the proposal.

At this point, we are concerned that the needs of our supporters will not be met if the name and mission statement of the Gender Council are broadened to that of a Diversity Council, Social Justice Council, etc. Specifically, we are concerned that the unique experiences of trans students of color, white trans students, queer students of color, queer students with disabilities, queercrip students, and others

will not be adequately addressed. Our concern here is that, while we trust that the Administrators with whom we have been collaborating have good intentions and want what is best for the community, they do not have the experiences of marginalization, tokenization, threats, and invisibility that we have experienced in the classroom, in the dining halls, and on the sidewalks. As this proposal arose out of these lived experiences, and out of what we need to survive on this campus, denying or diverting the proposal runs the risk of failing to meet the complex needs of large segments of our community.

We are also concerned that the proposal for an umbrella Diversity/Inclusivity/etc. Council has the possibility of setting up a false dichotomy between itself and the proposed Gender Council. The Gender Council is designed to be attentive to gender as an intersectional concept. While it would heed the specificity of race, disability, class, religion, etc., we did not envisage the Council as an umbrella organization attending to all aspects of diversity. We wholly support the administration's desire to attend to the particular ways in which social inequities manifest themselves in Middlebury; however, we also believe that such a committee has a very different mission than our proposed council, and we do not see them as mutually exclusive.

In order to assuage these concerns, and to ultimately produce the most productive, transparent, and democratic group possible, any council that would have our support and involvement must meet the following criteria:

- "Gender" must remain in the title, and remain the focus in the mission statement.
- The structure and membership must remain as outlined in the proposal—i.e., experts from the WAGS program, Chellis House, CCSRE, and other locations must still be offered *ex officio* seats.
- The term "expert" [when used in reference to gender—certainly the Council will have experts from a variety of other fields] must not be expanded to include people who have passion, but not adequate background, in the study of gender and sexuality as intersectional concepts.
- Membership must be assembled and meetings begin within the next two weeks.

Based on the latest conversations we have had with Dean Collado and President Liebowitz, we are willing to compromise on the following fronts:

- After the Council is formed, we recommend that an open meeting be held with its current members, with Administrators, and with other community members to determine a name that best describes the work of this council and makes it most accessible and visible. Again, we recommend that the name not be chosen unilaterally by either the Gender Council coalition or the Administrators, as this Council ultimately belongs to the community as a resource.
- Following the advice of the members of Community Council, we would agree to work on an ongoing basis with the Administration in determining who is offered an *ex officio* position, as long as there are still seats reserved for the Director of Chellis, at least one WAGS professor, a member of CCSRE, and others specified in our proposal.

After speaking with our constituency about the possible outcomes of the current negotiations, we feel that these conditions are essential to the successful pursuit of our work. If they cannot be met, we regrettably cannot continue to work in this fashion, and would not be willing to participate in the formation of a council other than the one we have outlined. Further, we ask that, if we withdraw from participation in the efforts to create an institutionalized council, none of our formal work—e.g., proposal, executive summary, language, etc.—be used in such efforts. Over 1,000 hours of student labor went into producing the written documents of the Gender Council and the philosophies behind them. If the language in our proposal is used absent the careful thought behind it, it would be a disservice both to us as student leaders and to the College community.

Additionally, if the administration opts not to establish the council we have proposed, we and our supporters have resolved that the most effective and reasonable plan of action would be to enact a non-institutionalized version of our proposal, which would tentatively be called the People's Gender

Council (PGC). The PGC would begin meeting immediately, with representatives from faculty, staff, and students of every graduation year, and would begin working on the policies and campaigns outlined in our current proposal. While the exact structure and function of this new council is yet to be determined, we would be willing to serve as the resource we have always offered to provide this campus: e.g., we would produce reports, policy recommendations, etc., for use among policymakers. In other words, the PGC would still serve as an advisory body for anyone seeking our expert analysis, even if we are not formally institutionalized as a permanent body. Further, we would like it to be clear that the Administrators, staff, and faculty with whom we have been collaborating would be welcome at all of our meetings.

Given the fundamental disagreements that have become apparent between the Gender Council coalition and the Administrators involved in this process, we and our constituency believe that a council that functions further outside the influence of the Administration may ultimately be the most effective in meeting our original goals: to radically challenge privilege and oppression at Middlebury, to make this campus accessible to and inclusive of all bodies and identities, and to restructure power relations such that that all students, staff, and faculty feel that they belong, that they can flourish, and that their concerns will be heard by those in positions of authority.

We look forward to meeting with you on Tuesday to discuss our concerns and possible courses of action. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter so close to our meeting.

Sincerely,

Lark Mulligan
Joey Radu
Elizabeth King
Viveka Ray-Mazumder
Nate Kerr