SSIR: THE SYSTEM THE ADMINISTRATION PRESENTATION

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Background

Our Sophomore Scholars in Residence (SSIR) Experiences

Our class has taught us how to look at systems and structures that influence everyday life. Particularly we have viewed systems through the perception that an objective view is impossible from within and to try to gain an outside view.

BIG CONCEPTS

1) Neoliberalism
2) Agency and Power

In proceeding through our project we were asked to apply modes of thinking and concepts from our class to gain a structural versus individualized perspective.

Neoliberalism, coined in the early 19th century, is commonly associated with the ideology that **society should be shaped by the free-market,** also known as laissez-faire. It replaced Keynesian economics, but later failed and contributed to the Great Recession of 2007-2008. The transformation of the state from a provider of **public welfare to a promoter of markets and competition** helps to enable this shift.

More simply, the assumption that individual freedom is guaranteed by the market. Neoliberalism places focus and blame on the ability of an individual to work within a system

Neoliberalism

➔ Focus on the business-like relationship between students and administration.
➔ Is it the university's job to produce active global citizens, or simply produce individuals for the workforce?
➔ What is the responsibility of the student in affecting this decision?

Viewing the university through a neoliberal lense places focus on a business-like relationship between students and administration. This view depersonalizes interactions, but raises the questions of the role of a university to provide a service to its consumers or 'something' more. Furthermore, in this format of thinking, what importance does the student play as a consumer or as an individual?

Agency - The capacity, condition, or state of being able to exert power.

➔ The main goal of our project is to look at who has the power to make what decisions and imagining a projected future where the students can have more agency within this structure.

In regards to students, we choose to investigate agency as defined above. In this system of administration and neoliberal lense, the individual requires some agency and power to make choices.

Why Investigate the Administration?

But why would a group in 'The System' investigate the structures of the administration? As college students, it surrounds us, but from a typical student perspective, the roles and responsibilities of the administration is confusing. We feel that for students to have proper agency, the structures should be comprehensible (like this car on the right)

So the goal for each of the projects was to attempt to imagine some future University of Richmond where some structural issue has been addressed and a 'better' future imagined. We took a two-pronged approach: adapting the current website, and proposing a form of A&S student government.

1.
**A More Interactive and Easily Comprehensible Website**

The internet is the piece of technology our generation interacts with most, and changes constantly. Hence, the school's website may not always keep up.

Website: Why did we do it? → Lack of Knowledge

➜ Students don't know a lot about the administration's organization
  ○ "Who does what?"
  ○ "Where is accountability to students?"
  ○ "Can this change?"

So we decided to investigate the administration using the website. But first, from querying students, students don't know a lot about the organization of the administration. They wonder who is responsible for what roes, how administrative choices are accountable to students, and whether change is possible.
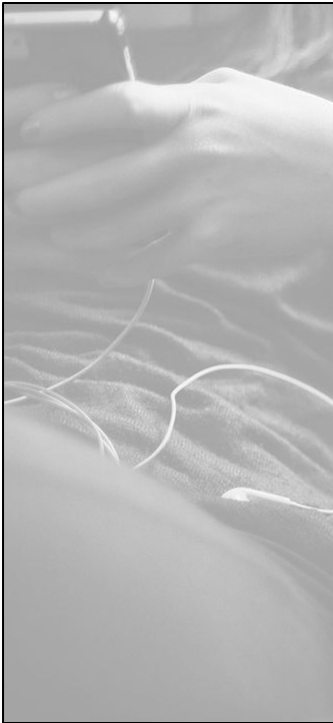
Even Administrators know how hard the system is to understand

"The system is really only understandable from within"

"Students can really only get it if they are part of a student government"

Similarly, administrators have admitting the difficulties of the administrative structure. There were multiple times when meeting with faculty and administrators that misconceptions or contrasting claims and information was presented to us. A particular quote of an administrator regarding student comprehension of the structure is above. This is interesting because unlike most systems we have investigated throughout class, the outside objective view is actually more detrimental than the insider perspective.
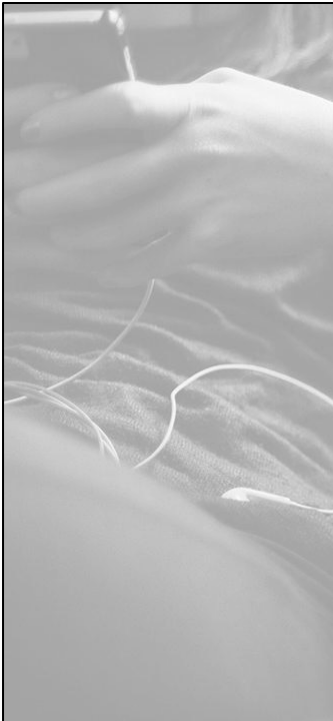
Process of obtaining information

➜ Talked to administrators (based on their willingness) to get their opinions on the present system and a possible future

➜ While probing the website, we found organizational charts, which were difficult to find or comprehend
  ○ Too difficult for individuals to have agency or voice

➜ Link: https://rosaleemcw.wixsite.com/mysite

So in order to gain a perspective on the administration we both probed the school's website with first the average skills of a student, and then with the assistance of Glyn and a "diving down the rabbithole" approach (time-consuming and difficult for an average student). We also met, emailed, and interviewed various administrative members (with varying responses and success). We discovered some organization charts on the Provost's website, but they were quite minimalistic and difficult to glean information from as they lacked even names of the people. Therefore, we decided to makes simple changes to the website and said chart that would be easy for the school to actually change to make the administration more accessible to students. This included simply putting names on the positions of the chart, as well as making easier to find on the website and interactive in that we linked the contact page of each position to the chart.

2.
More A&S School
Student Involvement

Where is our student
Government?

In addition to probing the website to comprehend the administrative structure, we discovered that in regards to academic student voice and input, the Arts and Sciences school is the only school without an explicit academic-based student government.

Student Government Situations

➜ Late 1990's: Richmond College and Westhampton College no longer related to School of Arts and Sciences Degrees

➜ RCSGA and WCGA remained

➜ Other Academic Schools developed their own student governments

In the 1990s, Richmond and Westhampton College became purely residential and were removed from the Degrees students received from the University upon graduation. The two student governments remained.

RCSGA and WCGA roles in current A&S Administration

➜ RCSGA and WCGA considered A&S Student Governments

RCSGA/WCGA Academic Committees
➜ Make proposals to University Faculty Senate

In these two student governments remaining, they were considered fill ins fof an A&S Student Government. While these student governments are responsible for a lot on campus, many students are unaware of their input to academic affairs or how students have input. The only major input they have to academic choices on campus are committee who make proposals to the university faculty senate. However, these committees carry little weight with the senate. Therefore, as visible through Dean Rankine's link of the website, we propose an A&S student government that functions similarly to the other academic student governments. Furthermore, this government would expand student input on faculty hirings. Some departments gather student input, but this would lead to all departments utilizing student input. Additionally, based on Dean Rankine's concerns, there would be varying levels of positions available for 'experienced/declared' students and 'undeclared/underclass' students.

Our Conclusions

Currently difficult to understand structure of administration
➜ Takes away agency of students to involve themselves
Further Analysis of Evolving Administration
➜ Even now, structure is being altered and constructed

In conclusion, our undertaking of this project has lead to realize that the administrative structure is extremely complex and difficult to understand. This is problematic in that it takes away from the agency of students to involve themselves in administrative choices. Furthermore, this project has revealed the perpetually evolving administration, and how further investigation is necessary, as well as future attention to changes that are made.
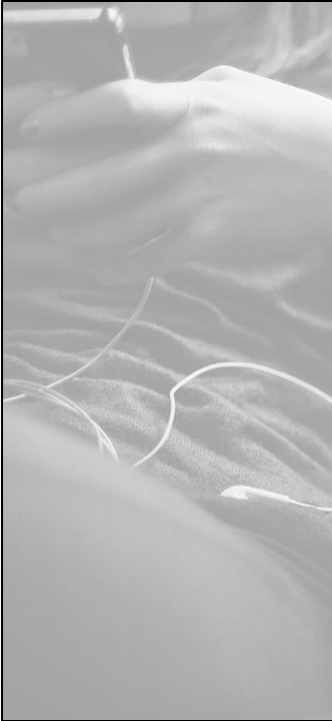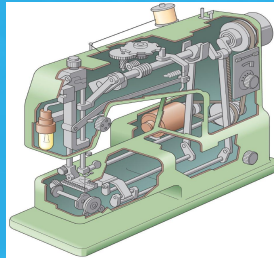
How to achieve our goal

Contact Kim Powell to make the changes to the organizational chart

Continue Dialogue with Administration, Faculty, and Students
➜ Issues will evolve over time

In this project, we also looked at how this future can be achieved in actuality. In order to being an actual process to building a future where students can interact easily with an understandable administration, there are multiple steps to consider. One concrete step we can take is to contact Kim Powell, who is responsible for generating the organizational charts we found, and suggesting/demonstrating the alterations we made. More broad and conceptually tied to increased student agency with administration long term is to continue generating a dialogue between administration, faculty, and students. Throughout this process, we found many aspects of miscommunication or lack of understanding, and a continuous dialogue would allow for greater understanding of the current system, as well as function to create a community across the campus that can address issues as they develop and change over time.