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Environmental concerns top the agenda for UCS

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At a time when celebrities race to "go green" and push to get environmental issues placed on the national agenda, the Undergraduate Council of Students has put carbon neutrality and other environmental topics among its priorities. This semester, UCS has worked to get the University to focus on carbon neutrality and environmental preservation.

At the beginning of the semester, UCS President Michael Glassman '09 told The Herald that the University's environmental policies were an area of concern. In an interview on Tuesday, Glassman said that though UCS was not the only student organization working on carbon neutrality, he was very pleased with the work the council had done in the area. UCS passed a resolution early this semester calling on the University to reduce its carbon emissions and increase environmental awareness.

"It's going to happen by the end of the semester that Brown will have set a goal (for a reduction in carbon emissions), and it's not our doing alone, but we've put a lot of pressure on," Glassman said.

The environment was not the only area in which UCS members looked to make changes. The council also focused its efforts this semester on improving campus life reviewing in its own proceedings.

Glassman said the council had a successful semester. "I don't think there's too many of our goals that we've fully accomplished, but I think we've made a lot of progress on a lot of them," he said.

The other major action UCS took this semester was passing a resolution to recommend the University Resources Committee raise the Student Activities Fee to \$200, an increase of \$54 over this year's fee.

Student Activities Chair Drew Madden '10, who spearheaded this initiative, began the semester intending to take action on the fee. He told The Herald in October that he wanted to get a feel for the student body's attitude about raising the fee and to recommend the increase if students voiced their support. The resolution was a major change from the Fall 2006 session, when UCS voted down a proposed \$13 increase.

The council has also been working behind the scenes. Members have met with President Ruth Simmons to discuss the Plan for Academic Enrichment and have engaged members of the Task Force on Undergraduate Education and the Faculty Executive Committee.

Much of council's work this semester was not done as a general body but through individual committees.

Academic and Administrative Affairs Chair Rakim Brooks '09 has worked on service learning classes and January@Brown. Brooks said his committee has made a lot of progress on both topics.

The January@Brown program has gained 12 participants since last year, bringing its current total to 31 students. Brooks' committee is also looking into making it possible to use the winter term as a way to integrate transfer students to Brown.

Campus Life Chair Ellie Cutler '10 said her committee began the semester with goals related to improving safeRIDE and Dining Services. Her committee has met with both organizations, and they have been receptive to their ideas, Cutler said.

The Campus Life Committee was unable to alter safeRIDE routes - a semester goal - but Cutler said other ideas including "barf bags in safeRIDEs" and "improved signage and knowledge around campus," were being considered for the future.

Early this semester, much of UCS' general body meeting time was spent on internal affairs. In September, the council was rocked by rifts among its members, and accusations of unfair election practices were lodged against Glassman and UCS Vice President Lauren Kolodny '08.

A weekend of compromise and discussion resulted in changes to the UCS code concerning special elections, proposed by Madden, and a UCS Assessment Task Force spearheaded by Communications Chair Gabe Kussin '09. The task force is designed to review the operations of UCS and give recommendations in the spring on how to improve the workings of UCS.

Many of the conflicts among members in the first month of the year stemmed from frustration with parliamentary procedure, which was a recurring theme at meetings throughout the semester. Some complaints centered on marathon meetings that dragged on due to the numerous mundane details of parliamentary procedure. Others complained about misuse of the rigid UCS guidelines, which sparked arguments at meetings, including a heated confrontation between Brooks and Madden during the approval process for the Student Activities Fee resolution.

Despite the problems, Glassman said he is happy with what the council has accomplished this semester.

"I'm pretty happy," he said. "I think there's a lot more to do, and there aren't very many areas where it's like, 'We had this goal, and we finished it.' "

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