





Introduction

The Illinois Math and Science Academy prides itself on offering a “uniquely challenging education” for its students, but with its role as a learning laboratory, Academics at IMSA are literally up for experimentation. Topics in this category like attendance and academic integrity are close to the concerns of most students, but IMSA is also an institution with the potential to push the boundaries of nationally-accepted best practices in education, from changes in curriculum to the standards of the college admissions process. The desire to advance IMSA's sense of academic innovation stretches beyond just Student Council, as the entire institution is frankly hungry to reenter the limelight of national educational innovation. In 2014, Student Council launched a landmark series of projects branded as the Pillars of Innovation, most of which were tied to topics in academics and related student stress. The Pillars of Innovation, like almost all Academic projects, require significant focus, because they deal with so many different staff and faculty members. In contrast to most Student Council projects, which involve one, perhaps two, Student Life members, academic initiatives bring students under the sphere of the Principal's Office, a department traditionally concerned more with faculty than it is with students. Reflecting on the Pillars and the response they generated from the Principal's Office, 2014 Student Council President Anthony Marquez writes that future Student Councils should watch for three concepts in their Academic projects: Documentation, Data, and Dualism. Student Council has learned over the years that administrators appreciate documentation, written descriptions of projects, their objectives, and any necessary clarifications. Documentation has been a stumbling block for Student Council endeavors in the past, with projects like the Honor Council spurring rampant misconceptions and leaving students, staff, and faculty without a coherent idea of what a project entails. With so many adults involved in Academic efforts, that cannot be afforded. Academic topics, being at the core of IMSA's mission, also require data to be taken seriously. The Office of Institutional Research can be a helpful partner here as they have aided Student Council in the past with collecting data through various surveys such as Quality of Life and also receive responses from the quarterly teacher surveys. Finally, the concept of dualism suggests that initiatives that are created for student benefit should also be coupled with a benefit to faculty, as it will make them more likely to support the project. There is a tremendous amount of potential in this category, and even though it may seem that students are not allotted enough influence in Academics at IMSA, well-positioned efforts can go a long way to improving our Academy. As Marquez wrote: "You may feel overlooked... marginalized. But you must never feel powerless."

Notable Projects

Catch Up Week (2005)

In 2005, the Student Council Academic Committee submitted a proposal to Student Life and the Principal's Office to change the two days prior to finals into early dismissal days. The policy moved forward in response to complaints that students lodged with Student Council over not having enough time to study and get enough sleep during finals week. Student Council made the proposal more palatable by adding provisional residential restrictions to the proposed academic change in order to ensure that students would use the new time responsibly. Those restrictions were to end overnight sign out for those days and postpone intervisitations until 4:30 PM. The proposal was approved in the first semester for December finals and for the second semester finals week, with teachers staying at school for the rest of the day to answer questions in preparation for exams.

The Honor Council (2008, 2013, 2017)

An effort spurred by Science faculty Don Dosch and 2008 Student Council Cabinet, the Honor Council is a proposal that seems to reappear cyclically. The project died off after a year and a half because Student Life felt that it was not given enough control in the structure, but then reemerged a few years later in response to a bout of plagiarism cases including the great SI Physics Moon Lab scandal of 2012, or "moongate." This time, while Student Life accepted the terms of the proposal, there was a lack of sufficient interest among the student body to move forward. The Honor Council was

to have a total of seven students, three Juniors, three Seniors, and a Senior President. A student who had breached an academic integrity policy could choose to have their case heard by the Honor Council rather than Student Life alone, with the punishment being some sort of community service project. Upon satisfactory completion of such a project, the student could then be reintegrated into the academic community in good standing, which was a major goal of the project. However, lingering questions about the project such as training the Honor Council, the definition of academic integrity, and the Honor Council's interactions with other student organizations on the campus stopped the project from moving forward. The project was revived again during the fall of 2017, but it faced logistical hurdles once again and was not pursued to completion. Thus, the string of revivals and obstacles with the policy seems to indicate that the concept is not something Student Council should push for in the future.

Course Evaluation Survey and Guide (2003-2018)

The Course Evaluation Survey (CES) and Course Evaluation Guide (CEG) has been a staple of the Academic Dimension's work over the years. It involves surveying students by course for details on workload, contents and then publishing a report of the results for rising upperclassmen to use while considering learning opportunities for the coming year. In addition to this service, the CES/G is also a remarkable continuous metric of academic intensity maintained by Student Council. A rigorous recursion of annual data has not been attempted by Student Council, but could offer

insight into better understanding academic complaints often voiced by students, including the claim that students today are being assigned significantly more work than students of previous years. However, surface observation of the CES/Gs shows a decline in respondents over the last few years. In 2005 many courses had response rates between 50% and 90% of all students enrolled in the course, but by 2010, this rate had declined to just a handful of students per course. In order to address the declining response rate to the Course Evaluation Guide, more recent versions of the guide have compiled data from multiple years to ensure that there are enough responses to make the data for the courses valid. However, this would eliminate the possibility of analyzing a recursion of the data.

Career Fair Series (2012-2013)

Student Council and the Student Committee for IMSA Advancement have traditionally collaborated to host a Career Fair in the winter, primarily using Alumni contacts and friends of the Academy. In past years, Student Council worked to expand the representation of “non-STEM” careers at this event, which many members of the student body have appreciated. Unfortunately, the 2014 Career Fair did not materialize due to weather challenges. Seniors on the 2014 Student Council Cabinet proposed the idea of more frequent career-based events, spread throughout the year to specialize on particular fields. This proposal faces the same challenge that the Student Council faced in rescheduling the winter Career Fair: many alumni can be difficult to find if not around the holidays. Now, the project has manifested itself as the various career exploration opportunities the SCIA and other IMSA clubs host for students.

IRC Focus Groups (2013-2018)

The IRC Staff regularly turn to Student Council for help raising awareness of new IRC projects and the department focus groups. Even Student Council members can be hard-pressed to attend these meetings, but despite that, many useful projects have come out of the IRC in recent years, including new digital skills workshops led by staff and students as well as research development programs for students that are growing increasingly important in an academic environment that demands high quality research skills from field-standard sources and databases.

Add/Drop Clarification (2013-2014)

Over the summer of 2013, Student Council partnered with the CACs to create an infographic explaining the various clauses involved in the Add/Drop/Move process. The goal of the project was to reduce the frequency of unnecessary CAC visits from students trying to twist and squeeze their way to their desired schedule. Counselor Julia Husen indicated that the infographic was a success from the CACs’ perspective, citing that 41 of the then 210 juniors visited the CAC office and all of their appointments were legitimate. She could not say the same for the 130 of the then 203 seniors that visited the CACs, but she attributed that to the fact that seniors must finalize their schedules for both semesters in the fall. Discussion with the CAC during the project revealed some other qualms that they had with the process. For instance, Counselor Julia expressed general distaste for students and teachers who send her signed notes trying to be added into a class that is already full. She noted that the faculty submit their own cap numbers on the number of students for each

section, and that teachers should make those caps represent the maximum number of student they can facilitate, not their personal preferences of class sizes to be changed at later dates. Her opinion is that CACs should check with the teacher to see if there is space to fit a student in a classroom, not the other way around, which causes stress for the CACs. Julia also mentioned that she holds student who “bulldoze” the CAC office to see if a class they want to add has opened up with space in higher regard than those who try to push signed faculty notes, but in her mind, the CACs’ preferred solution to Add/Drop/Move issues is for students to find a classmate to drop the class that they want and then make an exchange.

Personalized Teacher Comments (2013)

In the spring of 2013, Student Council President Anthony Marquez asked the Board of Trustees to promote the efforts of teachers who write personalized quarter and semester comments for their students. President Veal followed up on the request and learned that many faculty consider this a low priority because of the many other duties they have to complete around grading time. Faculty insisted that students should simply seek them out in person, as PowerSchool comments, even the generic and canned ones, are targeted at parents more than towards students.

The Pillars of Innovation (2014)

The Pillars of Innovation were Student Council’s first significant commitment to long-term projects at IMSA, packaging initiatives centered around reducing stress on campus under a format intended to be executed over many

years. Two Pillars, the Quality of Life Survey and the initiative to redefine the At-Large Position are not directly linked to Academics, though the Quality of Life Survey used to be administered by the Academic Committee (Now the Quality of Life Survey is a collaboration between Student Council and the Office of Institutional Research). These 12 projects were mired in a problem that became quickly apparent: the inability and lack of preparation of Cabinet members to work with high-profile academic topics and administrators. That issue was only exacerbated by an administration that had little to no incentive to include student initiatives in its calculations during the year when the Pillars were launched. The landmark debut of the branding in January of 2014 with the Pillars of Innovation Report fell remarkably flat, without so much as a nod from students, staff or faculty. That report organized the projects in order of “feasibility” or relative time until completion with the fastest-paced projects, like the Themed Open Forums first, and the excruciatingly long-term goals of the I-Day Specialization project last. They are listed as such below.

The Course Forum (2014)

The first installment of the Themed Open Forums and Roundtables Series focused on issues of Courses and Academics. It featured all the members of the Principal’s Office, with an unprecedented number of faculty stopping by after school to observe the event. The Course Forum launched into the topic of workload distribution, proposing increased use of the Universal Academic Calendar to remedy issues on campus. The idea of Syllabus Review Committees and the Exploration Sessions were also presented at this forum. Because discussion fixated on these topics, one last planned idea, having a flexible number of

papers due during the semester (an idea borrowed from Dr. Gleason's courses), was largely left out of the Forum. Critical reception of the Forum was largely negative: many teachers were displeased that students spoke so aggressively about what were perceived as proposed increases in faculty regulation and many students were upset about the behavior of Principal Lawrence on the administrative panel and that Student Council spent most of the Forum presenting rather than the open mic format that many expected. However, if student submissions collected leading up to the Forum are to be taken as an indicator of open mic statements, that alternative format might have turned out even more disastrous for faculty/student relations. To its credit, the advertising prior to the Forum was one of the most successful Student Council endeavors for such an event, aggressively collecting student input through online forms as well as live post-it note events during the week. Topics brought up in these submissions, such as course suggestions, referendums on the Academy's engineering curriculum, and huge swaths of workload complaints did not make it into the Forum's minute 45 minute timeframe. For future Student Council open discussions, they key balance between an entirely Council-oriented event and the volatile open mic may be to organically address the submitted topics, even if Student Council knows that they are unlikely to move anywhere. It will help the student body to hear a "shutdown" from administrators, whether they are real limits or just excuses, even if Student Council anticipated it. Perhaps monitoring the student buzz after such an event will clue the Council in on which core issues students are most concerned by and allow the Cabinet to pursue initiatives targeted at them away from the

limelight. Experience has shown that such "shadow" projects are a better environment for progress than the open discussion environment, which is but a forum for talk.

Exploration Sessions (2015)

Using inspiration lent from social studies curriculum at the Uni High Laboratory School in Urbana, the Exploration Sessions model provided a twist on class content. It asked the teacher to present a few topics related to a theme in the course syllabus and allow the students to select one of them to focus on for two specified class days during the semester. Though many teachers already practice similar formats, Student Council sought formal experimentation with a pilot program of this concept through the World in the Twentieth Century course, with the joint goal of examining how student input in class content relates to their engagement in it. This project is particularly notable because it is the first Student Council pilot program to ever directly affect classroom dynamics. As a long-term Pillar of Innovation, the Exploration Sessions served as a microcosmic model for future years in which students could play a large role in choosing class content and even designing courses. Student Council's execution of the project struggled through faculty opposition and bureaucratic runarounds from the Principal's Office, but was able to ensure a pilot program in the second semester. The support of history Curriculum and Assessment Leader, Dr. Eysturlid was crucial to this outcome. Compilation of the data and final results was heavily delayed, but data analysis allowed Student Council to reject some major null hypotheses, for example: that there was no difference in student interest in course topics between regular class sessions and the

Exploration Session. In spite of these discoveries, the Exploration Sessions were not high on the priority list for the history department and Student Council began to shift its attention to the computer science program, as shown by the work done in the Student Computer Science Initiative (SCSI). As a result of these factors, the impact of the exploration sessions on the curriculum of history courses is unclear.

Modifying Student Surveys (2010, 2014)

Student Council worked with Ms. Hinterlong to address a major complaint from the Student Body. A variety of students complained that teachers were not responding to comments they had discussed in their student surveys. Student Council attributed the source of this problem to poorly constructed survey questions. After receiving a list of all the questions by course, along with the general questions, the first goal was to try to increase the specificity of the questions. Student Council felt that teachers put a greater emphasis on responses that are presented by multiple students. Student Council concluded that because the questions were not very specific, there would be a very small likelihood that multiple students would present the same problem to a teacher. Hinterlong had mentioned that previous Student Councils (around cabinet of 2010) were involved with the creation of the current survey which is traditionally reworked every 4 years. One of the problems that the Cabinet of 2010 attempted to address was an overabundance of questions in student surveys. This led to the creation of more vague and generalized questions. The next phase was to distribute the course specific

questions among various focus groups, which were each headed by one Student Council member and included student volunteers that had showed interest in the subject at hand. Unfortunately, despite many students' complaints about the quality of student surveys, very few students actually signed up for the committees. The groups met and each group provided feedback on the questions that they were assigned to. Finally all of the information was provided to the Principal's Office. Unfortunately Ms. Hinterlong did not put these changes up for consideration, insisting that the CADRE Committee was too busy to revise the survey because of the changes to the CADRE system. Ms. Hinterlong noted that Student Council would have to stick to Principal's Office timelines in the future if they wished to be involved in their work. This came up despite the fact that Student Council provided her the feedback within the timeline that she, herself, provided the Council with.

The Modern Transcript (2014)

Initiated by President Veal, Student Council began a drive to redesign IMSA's college transcript with its first Leadership Focus Group in 2014. The project took inspiration from organizations like OpenBadges, an online platform that offers accreditation for a variety of skills and experiences. After holding a Focus Group, Student Council envisioned a number of ideas from honoring students' performance in clubs and multiple SIR investigations to breaking courses down into their essential skills and rewarding students who display distinction in those regardless of the final class grade. Mrs. Veal expressed willingness, with IMSA students permitting of course, to submit iterations of the new transcript to universities on behalf of IMSA seniors. In spite of the fact that the project

would certainly put IMSA under a national spotlight as a learning laboratory, it didn't continue mainly because students were unwilling to act as "guinea pigs" for a new transcript, and, after meeting with college admissions counselors, Student Council learned that most admissions counselors would still require conventional documentation of grades and would primarily rely on that information to determine college acceptance.

Late Start Transitioning (2013)

Student Council pursued an obscure and admittedly challenging class schedule model in the fall of 2013 that would reduce mods by 2-3 minutes each in order to provide time for a late start to the school day. Little to their knowledge, while this proposal was being developed, the Principal's office had already gained fast track approval for a new class schedule model to replace the 20-Mod system and was but ironing out final provisions. This latter model was designed to increase equity among students' schedules and access to resources during the day, but those intentions were poorly expressed until Student Council took over the communication of the schedule change from the Principal's Office. When Student Council first learned of what was essentially an already finalized plan, many students were being agitated by faculty rumors of the changes. The reason for these rumors was an unconventional leadership strategy adopted by the Principal's Office in planning for the change: only discussing the provisions of the proposal that they felt were applicable to a certain group with them. This not only meant that faculty were not even aware of the entire schedule model when they talked about it to their classes, but that certain groups due to be affected by the change, like TALENT and the Service Learning

department, were not even informed of the proposed change. Though the Principal's Office did not anticipate it, those two groups as well as several chartered clubs were to be negatively affected by the proposal because it cut out middays, an important meeting time. Student Council was able to request that midday stay, much to the irritation of Principal Lawrence, but widespread distaste for the proposal, without even having full knowledge of its provisions and rationale, breached the student body. The Principal's report on the proposal, which was lackluster in focus as well as basic grammar and presentation skills, focused so much on changes in class time that many students mistakenly believed that the proposal came with a mandate from the state to increase students' time in class and reduce free time during the day. No such mandate exists, but in fact, the new schedule model would increase free time during the day for many students. Student Council used visits to every hall after check to explain the provisions of the change, but faced strange opposition from the Principal's Office, which overruled Student Life's decision to make those events mandatory and stopping just short of preventing the Student Council representatives from making those presentations in the first place. The most disappointing theme of this topic was the ineffectiveness of the Principal's Office in failing to gather and communicate different points of view. Furthermore, the administration limited Student Council's ability to communicate the changes with greater clarity in an attempt to avoid further student controversy over the changes, a strategy that was nonsensical. Student Council took a disproportionate role in rescuing the Principal's Office from even more backlash over a change that it was barely included in, shouldering post-check

presentations, open houses, and webpages to better inform the student body. In this manner, the naming of this Pillar as one of “transition” became frighteningly true. Since the Principal's Office displayed little willingness to do so, Student Council should take a heavy role in analyzing metrics related to the change to ensure that future comments made on the Academy's class schedule are not irresponsible. Especially because such comments might stir debates between students and teachers, both groups which are liable to create a raucous over the topic without trying to understand each other's perspectives. It is important to keep in mind that these schedule changes took place in the 2013-2014 school year, and during recent years, communication and the relationship between Student Council and the Principal's Office has improved. Additionally, since the implementation of the schedule changes, students have generally adapted to the new system; although complaints about the short length of midday continue to persist in the student body.

Attendance System Changes (2013)

When Student Life indicated in the spring of 2013 that they were open to changes in the Attendance System, Student Council took the opportunity to devise alternative measures. Staff were concerned that the current system had few interim provisions between a student's first tardy or absence and the possibility of having a withdraw failure (WF) in a class, while faculty felt that the system was too lax on students and allowed them to ignore class time. The biggest change that Student Council wanted was to better distinguish an absence from a tardy, in order to reduce the number of students who decide to skip class because they are already ten minutes late. This aligned well

with Dr. Hernandez' goal of moving an absence to be half the class length. But, once again, the Principal's Office was working on a new system of their own. When Student Council members were invited to hear about this new proposal, Principal Lawrence said that he would only accept two student representatives and that they should be held to secrecy over the provisions discussed. In private meetings, those two Student Council members supported what many students later considered to be harsh changes and kept to the Principal's request for secrecy by not sharing any of these items in cabinet meetings. The most controversial of those changes was the recommendation of an Attendance In-Hall (AIH) violation, which would require students to stay in a designated location for four and a half hours and study if they accrued a certain number of attendance points in one class. When the new attendance system was revealed to Student Council, it was dropped to a lower level of priority because Student Council was preoccupied with communicating changes to the class schedule and handling controversy over another unilateral administrative decision to close the residence halls during certain parts of the day for the coming year. Meanwhile the proposal went to consideration by the faculty, where Dr. Hernandez discovered that teachers were divided perfectly in half amongst themselves over whether or not to accept the half point absence definition. With the Principal's office preoccupied with parental and alumni backlash over the residence hall changes, handling the attendance policy fell to Dr. Hernandez. Student Council worked with Dr. Hernandez to modify the system to reduce the length of the Attendance In-Hall violation, change the point tiers at which provisions came into effect, and offer a new proposal with a two-point

unexcused absence to fill the 10-minute gap in a class period. The last change made the proposal more acceptable to faculty, though barely so, and Dr. Hernandez had the system finalized just before sophomore orientation.

Percentage-Based Grading (2015)

Tied to the goal of reducing student stress related to academics, Student Council hoped to remove the stigmatized difference between As and Bs on campus by converting IMSA's transcript to a percentage-based system. Before administrators actively looked at the proposal, it began to catch controversy among the student body, who felt that a percentage-based system, while taking pressure off students around a 79% or 89% grade, would raise pressure on students at an 80% or 90%, revealing the fragile state of an otherwise strong letter grade. Student Council clarified that the primary goal of the project was to make the grading system more honest, but the project remained unpopular, especially among students who reported that their parents were more likely to harass them about a grade entered in PowerSchool - the group that this project was intended to benefit. The project was eventually tabled because the CACs informed Student Council that a college admissions officer, regardless of what was written on the transcript, would simply convert the grade to their university's own letter equivalent.

Syllabus and Course Review Committees (2014-2015)

This project sought to increase outlets for student input in course content by piloting committees of students in four courses: American Studies, Object Oriented Programming, Mathematical Investigations IV,

and Engineering. In order to avoid the common faculty argument that a successful initiative in one department would not necessarily work in another, Student Council targeted courses from four different departments. The representatives quickly discovered that faculty have little appetite for taking in regular student feedback. Dr. Eysturlid, stepping in once again to offer counsel to the student groups, suggested that lackluster student survey responses are a long-term damper on the faculty's eagerness for increasing student contributions to decision-making and planning, with teacher complaints to the tune of "if my students are dissatisfied, they should just say so in surveys!" Dr. Eysturlid maintains that the existence of Academy-sponsored course input makes input from Student Council irrelevant in many teachers' eyes and suggested that if students really feel that surveys are not enough, Student Council should investigate why the surveys have failed to deliver actionable suggestions. One cause he offered, was that students do not want to give poor ratings to a teacher right before the semester ends and that instructor is due to grade them. A positive outcome from this project was a general strategy to approaching faculty with Student Council ideas. Just as much knowledge has been gained from informal chats with Dr. Eysturlid, 2014 Student Council President Anthony Marquez was able to secure Dr. Condie's interest in student assessment of the MI courses simply by offering it as an idea outside of class and outside his role as President. This project, which had its origins in the Course Forum, became connected to many negative faculty impressions of Student Council and the more successful aspects were achieved by disconnecting from their perception of a student organization dedicated solely to criticizing their work.

Universal Assignment Calendar (2014)

One problem that Student Councils for the last few years have tried to approach is that student workloads are very imbalanced from week to week, with some weeks holding an excessive amount of projects and other being bare. The Universal Academic Calendar (UAC), referred to as the Major Assessments Calendar by the faculty, is an online interface for teachers to add in information about their major projects and exams and many look to it as a way to harmonize course workload schedules by showing where assessments and projects are most concentrated. Since enforcing the use of this calendar contradicts the Academy's philosophy of not infringing on individual teachers' styles and practices, the UAC is of little use to anyone. Faculty have shut down historical drives from Student Life and Student Council to increase usage of the calendar with the traditional argument that students simply manage their time poorly, leading to workload imbalances. However, the 2014 Student Council Cabinet saw unprecedented progress on the issue following its reintroduction at the Course Forum, with the Calendar being added to faculty training by the end of the year. Though the topic was met with much faculty distaste after the Course Forum, Student Council won the help of a key ally on the initiative: Dr. DeVol, the Operational Coordinator of the Science department. Dr. DeVol has long pushed the Major Assessments Calendar upon deaf ears, making his job as OC much more difficult. He took over the project from Student Council after the Course Forum, serving as a faculty voice and a liaison to the ITS department, which is worked on improving the interface to make it more accessible to faculty users. However, the

calendar soon fell out of use due to lack of faculty participation which caused a domino effect. If one faculty member didn't update the calendar with their assessments, other faculty members could choose any day of the week for their assignments and assessments, undermining the ability of the calendar to effectively spread out assignments.

I-Day Specialization (2013)

Formerly called Student Inquiry Specialization, this project was created to reduce pressure on students who did not want to be involved in SIR and to provide them resources to pursue inquiry in topics not suited to the SIR program through other outlets. This led to a process of shuttle diplomacy between various organizations tied to the support of student independent inquiry projects, such as TALENT, Kids Institute, and the Service Learning Department. Student Council was exposed to the politics underneath SIR's rise as a successful and prominent outlet for student research and dabbled in ways to try and lift other organizations to that level. Doing so is an excruciatingly long-term endeavor, and is better left to those organizations themselves. The renaming of the project framed it under a new value proposition: that the I-Day is a resource given for students to engage in creative freedom through whatever outlets they choose. There was an anti-SIR undertone to this initiative, in that it replaces the claim of the CAC office that "students come to IMSA for SIR" with one stating that "students come to IMSA for the I-Day." While it was easy to misconceive the project's goals in this manner, Student Council aggressively distanced itself from appearing to undermine SIR. Since the origins of this project in 2013, alternatives to SIR have grown tremendously in popularity. For example, the

addition of IN2 to IMSA has provided students with the resources they need to start entrepreneurial initiatives at IMSA and has also increased interest in TALENT. In fact, data from the 2017-2018 Quality of Life Survey indicates that 117 students participate in IN2 projects and internships and 96 students participate in Independent Studies. However, another factor to consider in this diversification of I-Day activities is the unpopularity of the changes to the SIR Program that potentially could have led to a decrease in participation in the SIR program. A potential Student Council project could be to gather student feedback about the SIR Program and the recent changes and use that input to recommend changes to the SIR Program.

Sophomore Pass/Fail (2015)

While there are varying reasons for students to enroll pass/fail in a given course, the common factor of pass/fail courses is that they provide leniency in terms of the grade that appears on the transcript. As a result of this grade leniency, Student Council proposed the bold idea of having all grades during the sophomore year operate under pass/fail conditions, meaning that, as long as a sophomore received a grade of a C or higher, a P would appear on the transcript. The motivation behind this initiative was to decrease academic stress put on sophomores as they undergo the transition to IMSA. Student Council worked with President Torres and other administrators to analyze various avenues for implementation. However, the project hit a few roadblocks, the main one being that colleges could not ascertain whether a student got an A, B, or C in a course which could negatively impact the students who received an A in the course. Additionally, teachers were concerned that students would

not be motivated to work hard in their class because, as long as the student didn't fail, they would receive a P. For these reasons, the project was unable to move forward.

Entelechy Labs (2016-2017)

Student Council decided to pursue a new route to promote academic innovation at IMSA by creating its own Intersession called "Entelechy Labs". The week, designed by Former Student Council Presidents Heidi Dong (2015-2016) and Vinesh Kannan (2014-2015) involved a series of mini-design challenges that encouraged students to apply knowledge from different disciplines and collaborate with each other. For example, one mini-design challenge was the "Vermin Vigilante" in which students took on different disciplines (public health, communication, sanitation, management) to address a rat infestation plaguing a city. The series of mini-design challenges culminated in a final project of developing a self-sustaining building. In later years, the Intersession changed its curriculum, appearing as the Aqua Labs Intersession of 2016-2017 led by Vice-President Evan Sun (2016-2017). And in 2017-2018, Heidi, Evan, and Vice-President Ben Cooper (2015-2016) led the Quake Labs Intersession. The Intersessions have transitioned from being a council led initiative to an alumni-led initiative to promote academic innovation at IMSA.

Peer Tutor Reform (2016)

In this initiative, Student Council worked heavily with Mrs. Amy Keck to identify problems with the existing peer tutor system and change the system to better serve students. Student Council identified multiple problems with the peer tutoring system such as the fact that there

were few tutors for higher-level courses, there were few tutors for lower-level courses who had actually taken those courses, and the application process for peer tutoring was not thorough enough. In addition to this, Student Council wanted to create the Science Hub, an area analogous to the Writing Center or Math Office that was solely dedicated to providing tutoring in science courses. To address these problems, Student Council worked with Mrs. Keck to create a peer tutor feedback form, a way for tutees to write feedback for their tutor, so that the tutor could understand how to better explain concepts to students. Additionally, the peer tutoring application for the 2017-2018 process became much more rigorous, involving an application, interview, and teacher recommendations. In regards to the Science Hub, the project faced several logistical problems. After meeting with former principal Dr. Dahleh, she mentioned that the reason spaces such as the Math Office and the Writing Center were so successful was because there was a single adult dedicated to maintain that space and keeping it available for students. Dahleh was unsure whether peer tutors could maintain the Science Hub in a similar manner without the aid of a science faculty member. Additionally, Student Council would need to find a new space that would be reserved for the Science Hub. For these reasons, the Science Hub was not created. However, the idea will likely remain popular with students, as many students find the Writing Center and Math Office to be useful resources, and as a result, future Student Councils may decide to revive this project to consider the positive impact it could have on students.

New Teacher Surveys (2017)

Similar to the difficulty that incoming sophomores have transitioning to IMSA, new teachers at IMSA can sometimes face various obstacles that can hinder students' learning in the classroom. After hearing student complaints about some of the new teachers at IMSA, Student Council decided to take a look at the issue to see what problems students were experiencing. Student Council held multiple focus groups and found that students' concerns about the new teachers were generally very specific to certain teachers. However, one thing many of the students could agree on, is that they would like to have an opportunity to submit feedback to the teacher much earlier than the end of first quarter or first semester, so that the teacher has the ability to improve their teaching style before it can significantly affect students' grades. Student Council proposed that these feedback forms should not be the same as the quarterly/semesterly evaluations that all teachers are required to do, rather, they should be forms that allow students to report specific incidences that occurred in the class. Another idea proposed was the Upperclassmen Task Force, a group of 4-6 upperclassmen (who could also be peer tutors) that would sit in on classes taught by new teachers to help evaluate the new teacher's teaching style. The advantage of using upperclassmen was two-fold. First, they had already taken the course, and would have different perspectives on the way certain material could be taught. Secondly, they could offer uncensored feedback to teachers because their grade would not be determined by the teacher who they would be evaluating. After consulting the advice of Dr. Condie, Student Council presented their ideas to the group of faculty members responsible for overseeing CADRE, a document which represents the

philosophy and terms behind IMSA's staff/faculty relationship. The CADRE members said they would send their feedback to Dr. Hernandez, who in turn, would send their feedback to Student Council. However, Student Council never received the feedback on the presentation, and as a result, was unable to continue the project.

Sophomore Navigation Reform (2017)

There are many resources that students can use for academic support such as the Writing Center, Peer Tutoring, Mrs. Keck (Learning Strategies Coordinator), and Study Sessions. However, students, especially new sophomores, may not understand how these resources or operate, or more importantly, understand how to ask for help. Although there is an academic support module that is part of Sophomore Navigation that describes these resources to students, Student Council wanted to improve this module specifically so that sophomores would have a better idea of how to ask for help from these resources by making the module more interactive. Student Council worked with the counselors: Kevin Kusy and Karen Schwartz to create a simulation-like activity that taught the sophomores the valuable lesson of asking for help when necessary. After the module was completed, the sophomores filled out a survey with feedback from the module, so that it can continue to improve over the next few years. While this project targeted a specific module, the positive survey feedback indicates that Student Council could work more with the counselors in the future to revise other modules.

Interdisciplinary Learning (2017)

During the fall of 2017, Student Council decided to pursue a project to find ways to incorporate more interdisciplinary curriculum into IMSA courses. Student Council sent out a survey which revealed that many IMSA students would like to see more social science courses such as Economics and Psychology. Another common survey response criticized aspects of the mathematics curriculum for relying too heavily on students to adjust to inquiry-based learning, a learning style that most students have never experienced before coming to IMSA. This sentiment was also expressed in the Quality of Life Survey in the spring of 2018 when certain student comments suggested that inquiry-based learning at IMSA was less effective in the math department compared to the science department. After gathering this student input, Student Council met multiple times with Dr. Don Dosch, the CAL of the Biology Department, to incorporate a Senior Capstone project that would allow students to explore a project in whatever field they would be passionate about. However, after meeting with Dr. Don multiple times, it became apparent that faculty needed more time to coordinate the details of the capstone project. The project soon became stagnant and was never continued. However, the student feedback gained from the project could be vital in motivating other projects.

Titanotes (2018)

Due to IMSA's schedule, athletes who leave early from school repeatedly miss the same class, meaning that with every meet/game they play, the athlete becomes further behind in that class. To address this problem, Student Council proposed the idea of Titanotes, a notes database where students could upload their notes, so that student-athletes would be able to

have access to the class material on the day that they were absent. To implement this project, Student Council presented the idea to the CAL's who were weary of creating a notes database as it would incentivize laziness in classrooms by allowing students to use other students' notes instead of taking their own in class. To address this problem, Student Council promised that the notes would be refreshed each semester, so that the notes would not accumulate over time and act as a "notes bank" for students to use. The CAL's also requested that the program be piloted before full implementation. Originally, the program was going to be piloted with Advanced Chemistry, American Studies, and BC Calculus I. However, the teachers from these classes did not give permission for the pilot to occur, and for now, the project needs to find other courses in order to complete the pilot program.

Teacher Appreciation Week (2018)

Both Student Council and PAC held events during Teacher Appreciation Week to show teachers the gratitude students and parents have for the amazing education IMSA faculty provides. Student Council worked with ISP to create a video showcasing compliments and thankful comments from students praising their teachers for all of the hard work they do for students. Throughout the week, Student Council also distributed letters from students to all of the teachers to show how appreciative the student body is of the IMSA faculty. In the future, IMSA StudCo can collaborate more with PAC to create the events for the week and have a more successful teacher appreciation week.

Relevant Administrators

The Principal's Office

Principal Robert (Bob) Hernandez leads the team of staff members focused on the academic development of the academy. He was chosen to be Principal after Dr. Dahleh's resignation, and thus, was Interim Principal during the 2017-2018 school year. However, he will continue to be IMSA's Principal for the foreseeable future because of the newly created position of Dean of Instruction, which will be filled in the 2018-2019 school year. As a result of this change in roles, Dr. Hernandez will now be in charge of the SIR Program, the CAC's, the IRC, funding for academic programs, the hiring process, and other areas of academics not covered by the Dean of Instruction. Dr. Hernandez is joined by Ms. Diane Hinterlong, who serves as the Assistant Principal. She is involved with tasks such as assessing IMSA's intersession and maintaining the CADRE Document which represents the philosophy and terms behind IMSA's staff/faculty relationship. In addition, Ms. Colleen Geihm is Dr. Hernandez's administrative assistant, meaning that she manages Dr. Hernandez's schedule, and thus, is a good resource to request meetings with Dr. Hernandez.

Dr. Jose Torres, President

The President of IMSA is a largely a figurehead whose real influence comes from staffing appointments and legislative legacy with the state government. During his time at IMSA, Dr. Torres is spearheading groundbreaking initiatives that will significantly impact IMSA's future. In order to achieve fiscal sustainability, Dr. Torres has proposed to have non-Illinois students attend IMSA for \$50,000 and is interested in creating a research park as well as building new dorm(s) that would be more cost-efficient than the current IMSA dorms. Additionally, Dr. Torres is very involved in the International Student Science Fair. While some of these initiatives have seem some negative feedback from both students and faculty, Dr. Torres hope for the future of these projects is high, and these initiatives show his desire to revive IMSA's reputation as a learning laboratory.

Dr. Amber Pareja, Director of Institutional Research and Effectiveness

The Office of Institutional Research (OIR) is designed to analyze IMSA's performance as well as to study themes in education policy related to the Academy's mission statement. This is primarily through the management of logic models, the state of Illinois' "preferred" method of "organization." OIR worked heavily with Student Council to collect data through the Quality of Life Survey of 2017-2018 and the Challenge Success survey. Due to the results of these surveys, Dr. Pareja is working on an initiative known as the Year of Inquiry to address widespread problems at IMSA that were revealed by the results of the surveys.

The Faculty Conveners

At the Academy's inception, the teachers of IMSA remarkably voted three times not to unionize. Instead, they have adopted a complex leadership structure connected to the Principal's Office as well as more mobile part to engage faculty opinions on an institutional level. These teachers are known as the Faculty Conveners, elected by the faculty to voice their concerns, propose reforms, and communicate administrative decisions. The current Conveners are

The Curriculum and Assessment Leaders (CALs)

There is one Curriculum and Assessment Leader (CAL) per department. They are the de facto leader and spokesperson for the department and as their name suggests, they are in charge of content and curriculum changes as well as examinations for relevant courses. The Curriculum and Assessment Leaders for 2018 are Devon Madon (English), Mary Beth McCarthy (Fine Arts), Lee Eysturlid (History), Matthew McCutcheon (Math), Don Dosch (Science), David Lundgren (Wellness), and María del Carmen De Avila (World Language). The leader for curriculum design (usually the Service Learning Coordinator) in Student Life is also grouped with the CALs for all intents and purposes of the Principal's Office.

The Operation Coordinators (OCs)

There is also one Operational Coordinator (OC) per department. They are in charge of internal matters, like ensuring that teachers complete their grades and add items to the Major Assessments Calendar. The Operational Coordinators from 2014 were Adam Kotlarczyk (English), (Fine Arts), Rob Kiely (History), Micah Fogel (Mathematics), David DeVol (Science), Mary Meyers (Wellness), and Agnieszka Michalak (World Languages).

Amy Keck, Academic Support Specialist

The role of Academic Support Specialist includes tasks such as supporting students in lower academic standing (along with the students CAC), managing the peer tutor program, and providing resources for all students that improve their academic standing at IMSA. Student Council has worked multiple times with Mrs. Keck on various projects, and Mrs. Keck has also been implemented changes of her own to improve academic support at IMSA, such as the creation of head tutors.

Information Resource Center

The IRC works very hard to create an environment that is helpful for many students. Mrs. Angela Richardson is the IRC Supervisor and manages interlibrary exchanges and access to different books in the IRC. Dr. Christian Nokkentved helps maintain the IRC Archives, an important tool that Student Council began to utilize in 2013 but has underutilized in recent years. Ms. Jean Bigger, who works with Technical Services in the IRC, has also been very helpful to Student Council in securing new resources for workshops and other projects around campus. Finally, Ms. Connie James-Jenkin, who is the new Reference and Collection Development Librarian, has also invested a lot of time in revamping the IRC's research workshops, something that many in the History and English departments are eager to see utilized as a resource for students.