Leadership in Practice

Before I went to the IRHA Friley Senate meeting, I did a little bit of research on IRHA. I found that it is a very large organization overseeing and representing all of the students that live in the residence halls. I talked to the Friley Vice President, and he mentioned that not a lot of people know about IRHA, what they do, or what the acronym even stands for (Inter-Residence Hall Association, if you didn’t know). I decided I’d like to go a meeting to find out more about this organization and to get involved with it. As I mentioned in my proposal, getting involved was very easy to do, seeing that the Friley President, Vice President, Treasurer, Social Chair, Sustainability Coordinator, and of course our house president all lived on my floor and attended Friley Senate meetings.

I chose this group partially because of all the access I had to the information because of these people, and also because I’ve never been involved in such a large organization and I wanted to learn how larger meetings function efficiently. This is similar to what I mentioned in the proposal as well. In any of the groups I’ve been involved with, we’ve never had minutes or a gavel or any of that fancy stuff, so I was intrigued as to how it all worked out.

When I actually went to the meeting, I expected it to be a formal meeting since IRHA is a relatively formal organization compared to most of the groups on campus. It turned out that I was very correct in assuming the formality. IRHA meetings are run using Parliamentary procedure, which is a strict governing process used originally in the British House of Commons and has become a standard (in various forms) for conducting formal meetings. The meeting was very organized, with a sectioned minutes page given out as people walked in. There were very specific sections, even when there was nothing going on in those sections. The Vice President runs the meeting, and he is the only person who can give others permission to speak. When someone wants to speak, they would have to raise their placard to indicate so and the Vice President will call on them.

As I said, the Vice President ran the meeting, and thus was the major image of leadership during the meeting. He conducted himself with a strong demeanor by speaking in a loud, authoritative voice. Keeping order wasn’t really a difficulty for him since all of the senators were well-behaved people who had done this countless times before, but nonetheless he kept order regardless. He ran the meeting well, sticking to the minutes the entire time. In subsequent meetings (I’ve been going since the first one on September 20th) he even made a comment when a long-winded guest speaker had begun to drag the meeting longer than was intended. The Vice President is definitely a “gold” leader, as he’s the most detail-oriented of the rest of the cabinet. I think the other members of the cabinet are “orange” leaders for the most part, minus a “blue” leader or two. Perhaps I can’t judge them as well since they don’t talk very much, but that’s what it appeared to be. The only other exceptions would be the advisors, and possibly the secretary (Because she has to be, not necessarily because she *is*) are “gold” leaders.

The members of the senate are quite quiet only because they aren’t aloud to speak without permission, and I think that might put many off. If this isn’t the case, it’s because they are bored with what is being discussed (They are required to be there after all). They do speak up if something interesting is being talked about however. For example, when the subject of changing the meal plans came down from GSB and the main IRHA meeting, there was a good, long Q&A and discussion about what might be changed, especially including pricing. From what I can tell, despite personal differences, they work well together to get things done timely.

As for organization, it works pretty well, and Friley Senate got their parliamentary system from IRHA, who uses the same system to organize their meetings. There’s a good mix of leadership styles in the senate; some get things done more efficiently than others, however the mix provides a varied atmosphere. The knowledgeable, but seemingly uncaring President provides the feel for the meetings, which may not be the best, but the energetic Vice President drives the meetings forward and brings the senate news down from IRHA for the presidents to pass on to their houses.

Overall, I enjoyed the experience and I’m planning on continuing to go to Friley Senate meetings not only because I’m the Upper Friley Representative, but because it informs me about things I might not have known otherwise. I can then pass on this information to my constituents. Technically, I don’t have to go to the Friley Senate meetings (only the main IRHA meetings), but I will continue going anyway in order to learn more from fellow leaders and to make myself a better leader.