

Report on the State of the Student Government Association

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Introduction

The purpose of this report is to discuss in detail the past accomplishments, present state, and future goals of the Government. The SGA is under new and energized leadership that has begun to implement a new vision for student government at Colgate; a student government that works *for* the students but *with* the university's institutional leaders. Colgate is a unique place and every student is lucky to be here for four years of their life. The SGA is of the belief that every student has a role in building upon Colgate's success and improving their own experience through self-governance that incorporates accountability, transparency, and continuity. The SGA is proud to work for the interests of the students and advocate for positive change in the Colgate Community.

Governing with a New Constitution

The first semester of operation under the new Student Government Association Constitution has come to an end. Already, we have seen drastic changes in the operation of the government. The new Constitution calls for cooperation of the branches in order to function, and Leadership meetings have provided that forum. The Executive Branch has the opportunity to engage 45 active Senators individually and through their committee organization. Ideas and visions for the future of Colgate have been exchanged, and already we seen many of these visions starting to become a reality. No longer do we have separate braches working independently, but the new constitution has brought the SGA to a new level.

Additionally, the organizational model chosen by the Executive taking advantage of the creativity within the new constitution has allowed for proactive policy pursuits. In the past, SGA administrations have only had the capacity to handle the day-to-day operations of student government and react to policies proposed by Colgate's institutional leaders.

However, the organizational model implemented this past semester has allowed for an expanded advocacy platform.

Academic Honor Code

We are playing a key role in the process of updating the University's academic dishonesty policy in order to be sure that it reflects a realistic view of plagiarism. Currently, any confirmed report of plagiarism results in a minimum penalty of failure in the course, a punitive response widely regarded as overly harsh in certain cases. The Academic Affairs Board is working with faculty and student representatives to introduce flexibility into the process so that all cases are not seen in black or white. Once this review process is complete, we hope that certain minor or unintentional forms of plagiarism can be dealt with between the professor and their student by using it as a learning experience rather than a dismissal from the class.

Communication

The new constitution has an official Press Secretary position. While there has been a similar position in the past, the official role of Press Secretary is now an Executive Office created by the new SGA Constitution. With access to both the Campus Calendar and “YourColgate” emails, we have reached out to all members of the student body, promoting our new Donovan’s Pub and Fitness Space Working Groups, the Spring Party Weekend Task Force, and the return of breakfast at the Edge Café.

We have also created a consistent relationship with the *Maroon-News*, running the weekly “From Rob and Jenny” column and creating the “This Week in Senate” section. “From Rob and Jenny” allows the President and Vice President to directly reach the student body, discussing whatever issues they feel are relevant that week. “This Week in Senate” is a plain-text, paragraph-long version of the weekly Senate minutes, a feature that has struggled this fall, but one we plan to bring back full force next semester. The Press Secretary has had an incredibly productive first semester in existence, and the spring can only bring more productivity and achievement.

New York Times Campus-Wide Subscription

The SGA created a partnership to reinstate the *New York Times* campus-wide subscription program. The Speaker of the Senate created a mentorship program to pair more experienced senators with first-time senators in order to ensure continuity and greater collaboration. In fact, the co-sponsors of the resolution passed by the Senate in support of reinstating the *New York Times* subscription program were brought together by the mentorship program. The campus-wide *New York Times* subscription provides 250 papers per day to students. The resolution passed overwhelmingly and the SGA President and Speaker of the Senate were able to form a partnership between the SGA and the offices of the University President, Dean of the College, and of the Dean of the Faculty to fund the program for this academic year. It is a great example of the SGA teaming up with Colgate's institutional leaders to provide an excellent service to students on campus.

Rugby Goal Posts

The SGA assisted in the dissemination of information involving the facility upgrades, particularly the addition of new rugby goal posts installed on Alumni Field. Possible future upgrades include the possible expansion of fitness space at Huntington Gym. This will be made possible by eliminating the under-utilized Juice Bar. The SGA has taken precaution to make sure this policy was well-informed and supported by student athletes and fitness-center users. Finally, the SGA has maintained a working relationship with Student Athlete Advisory Committee, including assistance on an initiative to increase student-athlete leadership and service in the Hamilton school district.

SGA-Recognized Organizations

The semester has been productive on the Campus Involvement front and great progress was made through work with the CLSI during its leadership transition. The Liaison to Student Organizations has succeeded in working with the Student Organizations Committee in establishing several new groups on Colgate's campus. These include Black and Blue Colgate Tap, Students for a Free Tibet, and the Thurber Society. We are currently working with the Student Association for Voter Empowerment, the Russian Culture Club

and the Society of Chemists to complete their process of recognition. The Liaison has been helping groups make organizational revisions and constitutional updates. This semester saw the SGA begin to use its ability to create task forces to spearhead initiatives and programs. The Liaison, Parliamentarian, and Student Organizations Committee worked out the specifics of task forces and helped in the creation of the Spring Party Weekend Task Force. Overall, this semester the Student Organizations Committee and Liaison have helped their fellow students to contribute to Colgate's already vibrant extracurricular community and have developed new ways for Colgate students to get involved on campus.

SGA Formal

The first Student Government Association formal was held at Merrill House on November 16. Representatives from the Senate, Budget Allocations Committee and the Leadership danced with their dates while enjoying music, Roger's subs, and beverages. The night ended in a flurry as snow began to fall and the event's success ensured that the SGA formal will be a semi-annual event.

Website

Based on the framework of last year's successful campaign website, ColgateSGA.com is now an informative, up-to-date, and useful tool for students who wish to stay posted on campus-wide and SGA-specific news. The website is updated with news releases, a brief biography of all of the leadership team members, a clear description of the SGA's initiatives, and current contact information. Our goal is to update the website on a weekly basis. In the future, the website will become an avenue for student feedback and remain an up-to-date reference for the entire student body.

Policy Initiatives:

Environment

The SGA published its first report stating our environmental plan. The report included the SGA's initiatives as well as recommendations to the University for improving environmental policy on campus. Four short-term issues are discussed: environmentally

sensitive computer practices, managed use of bottled water, expanding use of biodegradable containers to downtown restaurants, and an on-campus recycling campaign. Three long-term initiatives are also discussed in the report: usage of compact fluorescent light bulbs, energy and water efficient appliances, and use of alternative energy sources.

Dining Services

The SGA's inquiry into the field of Dining Services at Colgate has been incredibly successful this semester. Members of Colgate's Administration have engaged the SGA in substantive dialogues to help the SGA work toward its goal of providing Colgate students with the best Dining Services structure possible. Recently, a letter from the Colgate administration explaining the changes made to the Edge Café over the summer was published in the *Maroon-News*. Aside from making clear the reasons for the change, the letter also expressed the success of the Colgate Administration's cooperation with the SGA this semester.

A major success for the Dining Services initiative this semester was the reopening of breakfast at the Edge. As a result of this partnership, the Edge is now open Monday through Friday from 9AM to 10:30AM serving a Continental Breakfast.

The second goal for the Dining Services initiative this semester was to help build a more efficient meal plan structure. The SGA recognized that the "block" meal plan that first-year students utilize is a great way to give students more freedom and flexibility in the use of their meals at the COOP. Starting in the Spring 2008 semester, the "block" meal plan will now be an option for any student on the Premiere meal plan.

The last goal regarding Dining Services policy this semester was student accessibility to information regarding their meal plans. If a "Meal Plan Performance Report" were able to be given to students at the end of every semester, they would be able to understand their usage and alter their plan in the future based on their needs. The report would contain information about how many meals a week the student ate, where he or she ate them, and when that student ate their meals.

Donovan's Pub

The SGA's Donovan's Pub Working Group was charged with developing a plan for the renovation and reopening of Donovan's Pub in James C. Colgate Hall. The Working Group wanted to revive Donovan's Pub as a useful venue for students and faculty alike that reflects the Colgate Community's interest in providing a space in which its members can socialize in a healthy, safe, and fun environment.

This report integrates the ideas of students of various class years, with the Assistant Director of Alumni Affairs RuthAnn Loveless, Director of Health Services and Wellness Initiative Member Dr. Merrill Miller, Director of Psychological and Counseling Services Dr. Mark Thompson, and various members of the SGA. Indubitably, this report offers a clear recommendation for the future use of the Donovan's Pub facility and provides guidance for those individuals within Colgate's Administration that exert control over such decisions.

Donovan's Pub has the potential to be a major social outlet on campus. It would ensure that students of every class year have a place to congregate for a number of activities, while ensuring a healthy environment in which to do so.

Satellite Fitness Center

A working group was launched comprising of 7 student members and chaired by Policy Coordinator for Campus Development Safwan Shabab '10 to study the possibility of a new satellite fitness center on top of the hill. The team has met with various administration personnel, inc. the Director of Athletics. The Wellness Initiative has agreed to serve with SGA on this initiative, thus providing more clout to the latter's efforts. The work for the report is in progress; currently the research for the proposal is being conducted and the working group expects to have its report ready by early spring.

Technology

Throughout the semester, the Policy Coordinator for Technology Initiatives has been working with ITS to resolve student concerns regarding technological issues on campus. Currently, the SGA is focusing on improving the Colgate email system, as the lack of storage space and difficult interface of the current system have long been an issue amongst students.

A replacement system based off of Google's Gmail is currently in the testing phase, which would offer unlimited email storage and a better interface for locating emails. Testing was recently opened up to the entire student body, and over 200 students have signed up for this new initiative. Those students will receive Colgate Gmail accounts over winter break so that they can evaluate this system.

The SGA is looking to create a venue in which students who have lived off-campus can provide information to younger students on their experience specific to their location and landlord. The SGA is also developing "RateMyGateLandlord.com"- a website that will allow students to read and write reviews on the Hamilton landlords. Students have had varied experiences with their off-campus housing arrangements. The SGA has met with several Hamilton landlords and the village mayor to gather feedback on the project.

Additionally, the SGA plans to work with ITS to increase the amount of bandwidth allotted to students on campus. Unfortunately, the small amount of bandwidth allotted to students restricts their ability to utilize innovative web technologies. The SGA is currently gathering bandwidth data from Colgate's peer institutions and plans to submit a report to ITS which will illustrate the need for increased bandwidth.

Conclusion

This has been an extremely successful semester for the SGA. The cooperation within the different branches of the SGA has been widely successful and has set a precedent of a balanced, transparent system of governance that can come together over key issues to advocate for the student body. At the end of this particular semester, it is important to remember that the SGA is not just the president and vice-president, or just the Senate, or just the BAC. Rather, the SGA is every member of the student body and we could not have achieved anything this semester without the continual support of Colgate students.

We look forward to serving the SGA next semester and presiding over what we hope to be an equally successful term. We sincerely thank all the students who have worked with us this year on the SGA Leadership Team and look forward to working with all members of the Colgate Community to continue to improve the Colgate Experience.