I. Progress Report

Since the formation of the Senate Reform Committee at the Senate’s first plenary meeting in September, our committee has met a total of three times throughout the months of October and November. We are happy to report that we have been successful with respect to making progress towards our stated goals, and that, furthermore, we intend to circulate a full draft of the Constitution to the entire Senate in advance of the January 2016 meeting.

Writing on behalf of the committee as its chair, I believe three developments summarize, from a bird’s eye view, our work. The first development was our discovery of the scope of our project. Initially, we interpreted our charge to be the reform of the portion of the Constitution directly pertaining to the Senate (Art. IV of the current constitution). It became clear to the committee during its deliberations, however, that a responsible reform of article IV depends on a reform of nearly every part of the Constitution. Accordingly, our efforts have enlarged themselves beyond Art. IV into every part of the Constitution, up to and including a re-ordering and re-articulation of the Constitution’s articles.

The second development crucially addressed our philosophy as a reforming body. Our committee’s deliberation prioritized the existence of the Senate in view of its existence as the most democratic body currently constituted within graduate student life in Boston College. In view of this, we have articulated roles for the Executive Board and the Office of Graduate Student Life, respectively, that formalize processes of decision-making that privilege consensus among the Executive Board, the Office of Graduate Student Life, and the Senate, as appropriate. As a secondary priority, our committee espoused strongly the ideal of modeling the circulation of power in ways that support social justice. One way we have done this — just to name one example among several — is to require gender diversity within Senate appointees from all of the student groups. Finally, we have espoused democratic process in our understanding of the Senate itself, and have thus proposed the existence of standing Finance, Disciplinary, and (Executive Board) Election Committees to aid in the annual functioning of the Senate.

A third and final noteworthy development within the committee has been a more definitive conception of the responsibility that the Senate has to the student body as a whole — an item that, in the past, has been delegated to the Executive Board within the GSA. Within our draft, we have made it clear that the Senate serves at the pleasure of the students whom the Senators represent, and, to this end, we have put into place processes allowing for the immediate hearing of any graduate student appearing before the Senate for any reason, along with a process for speedy written follow-up. In doing this, the Senate claims a space of institutional power that it has not in the past—a space of truly campus-wide, institutional advocacy based in each graduate school and recognized affinity organization on campus.
II. Request for Comment

To assist the committee in preparing its draft for plenary Senate review, we request the comment of all Senators on the following items:

(1): Should the Constitution mandate or make voluntary that the chairing of each plenary Senate meeting rotate among Senators?

The first meeting of the year will be chaired by the Director of Advocacy and Outreach of the Executive Board. All consecutive meetings can be chaired by either Director of Advocacy and Outreach of the Executive Board or any Senator. To become a chair for the next meeting, a Senator must inform the Executive Board about his/her wish to do so during one of the previous meetings. The chair is responsible for preparing the meeting in consultation with the Director of Advocacy and Outreach (who will supply agenda items), as well as for introducing and directing the agenda for each meeting.

(2): Should the Constitution mandate gender diversity between the two persons selected to be part of the Senate as ‘Senator’ and ‘Alternate Senator’?

(3): Should the Constitution mandate lifetime term limits of two terms for each Senator’s service?