

## Internal Memorandum

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To: Jermyn Davis  
From: Elliot Mamet  
Date: August 21, 2014  
Re: Student Trustee (S)election Process

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Beginning in the 2012-2013 academic year, Colorado College elected to include a student trustee position on the Board of Trustees. In my judgment, the student trustee position has been an unqualified success, enhancing the working relationship between trustees and students, greatly increasing institutional transparency, allowing for a greater diversity of perspectives in governance, and providing an extraordinary learning experience for the student trustee.

As the Board begins the third year with a student trustee, this memorandum offers one suggestion to improve Board governance: by changing the selection process to provide more weight to the student body's vote.

Currently, the student trustee is a voting board member serving a one-year term. The selection process is a hybrid between appointment and election. All candidates run in an election, which includes a public debate hosted by CCSGA. (The candidates must be full time students with a 3.0 GPA). The results are not published.<sup>1</sup> The top three candidates, randomly announced, are forwarded to the Governance Committee, who interviews those three candidates and selects one for full board approval.

In many ways, the current system has worked remarkably well. Over these last few years, the board has benefited from a student's perspective, and students have had a real stake in the strategic direction of the college.

I have immense faith in the judgment of my board colleagues who serve on the Governance Committee. However, the risk exists that future iterations of the Governance Committees might be tempted to filter the candidates based not on the candidates' qualifications, but on positions the candidate takes on issues on campus.

Consider this: A variety of issues confront the board, issues like how we choose to manage our endowment and what tuition rates ought to be. Student opinion often differs from board opinion on a particular issue. If members of the Governance Committee believe strongly that one particular campus issue should be handled a particular way, and if the three trustee candidates have three different opinions on the issue, an incentive exists for committee members to select the candidate with the most congruent views to the committee, at the expense of student opinion writ large.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that the *Catalyst* leaked the results of the 2012 – 2013 election; as a result, CCSGA tightened its election procedure and limited who reviews the results. See <http://catalystnewspaper.com/2012/09/21/student-trustee-results-leaked/>.

It follows that when placed in this position, the Governance Committee cannot be neutral with respect to the range of issues on campus. As I see it, this remains the biggest flaw of the current system: the need for the Governance Committee to somehow distinguish a student's qualifications for good board service from positions on campus issues, as well as the possibility for a future Governance Committee to filter candidates based on their position on particular issues.

As such, I respectfully propose that student trustees be elected by the student body, and approved by the Governance Committee and the full Board. This policy change would not require a Bylaws change, but falls to the discretion of the Governance Committee. See, e.g., *Colorado College Bylaws*, Art. I §1.2 (C)(4).

Precedent exists for this proposal within the Board. Namely, Alumni Trustees are "elected by alumni at large and approved by the Board of Trustees for non-renewable terms of six years from among those alumni of the College nominated by the AAB, in accordance with such nomination procedures and conditions as the AAB from time to time may adopt." *Colorado College Bylaws*, Art. I §1.2 (C)(2). The AAB, it is important to note, elects candidates autonomously from the Board; the Board is tasked with approving candidates, but not with getting involved in the selection process. While retaining final discretion over approving candidates, the Board is largely prohibited under the *Bylaws* from interfering in the selection process of the AAB.

Some precedent also exists for this proposed election process among other institutions. Duke University students directly elect a current student to serve a three-year term as Young Trustee. That individual gains voting status on the Board for their second and third years, after a one year 'observer status.'<sup>2</sup> At Cornell University, students directly elect two student trustees to serve staggered, two-year terms as voting members.<sup>3</sup> The Board of Trustees at Rhodes College consists of three non-voting student members elected by the student body, subject to Board approval.<sup>4</sup> While the *Association of Governing Boards* reports that 20.1 percent of independent (non-public) institutions have a student board member, it does not supply data as to what percentage of those student board members were elected as opposed to appointed.<sup>5</sup>

Thanks in advance for your consideration of this proposal. I look forward to working with you.

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<sup>2</sup> Moise, Imani, "Senior Neil Kondamuri chosen as Young Trustee," *The Chronicle*, 6 February 2014, <http://www.dukechronicle.com/articles/2014/02/07/senior-neil-kondamuri-chosen-young-trustee>.

<sup>3</sup> *Bylaws of Cornell University*, Art. II §2 (a)(4)(d), <https://trustees.cornell.edu/docs/052414-cu-bylaws.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> *Rhodes College Bylaws*, Art. II §3, <http://www.rhodes.edu/collegehandbook/11196.asp>.

<sup>5</sup> *Association of Governing Boards*, "Student Trustees," <http://agb.org/knowledge-center/briefs/student-trustees>.