

As prepared for delivery, respectfully submitted by
Alex Coccia STUDENT BODY PRESIDENT

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The State of the Student Union

Madame Chairperson, members of the Senate, Executive Cabinet, and guests;
thank you and good evening:

Before we departed for the Summer, I pledged that as a Student Government we would place ourselves on an affirmative path towards achieving our goals and creating a relevant student government. Your work has been invaluable to these efforts.

We have begun to lay the groundwork for a long term vision for Student Government, one in which we do not solely rest as beneficiaries of a Notre Dame experience, but rather as the creators.

A hard sought component of this experience was achieved this Fall. Through great collaboration, we have eased a hardship faced by generations of Notre Dame students. Now, that moment of recognition in a DeBart classroom that the final is indeed cumulative does not have to be faced alone. Students can be comforted by the warm companionship of a croissant and its trusty cup of coffee. In all seriousness, thanks to the hard work of Food Services and the Office of the Executive Vice President, the DeBart Coffee Cart is up and running, and has received widespread support from students. And thank you, Senate, for your feedback and input as we continually improve this service.

Students have been this semester, and will be in the future, involved in the direction of Food Services for the first time in twenty years. Our work with the new director of Food Services has just begun and we are excited to ensure students are involved in the conversation.

An important component of our Fall semester was the Mental Health Awareness Week. Thank you to all who participated in and supported Irish State of Mind Week. The week was created to raise awareness about mental illness here on campus and show the resources Notre Dame has for students to seek the help and support that they need. Throughout the week we wanted to reduce the stigma of mental illness, and many students helped by opening up and sharing their stories on Facebook and other social media platforms. We in Student Government want to thank those who shared their stories and make it clear that for the students who are still struggling, we've got your back. We will continue this important conversation through the Board Report Committee that will be developing recommendations to make further resources available for students. The work of the Board Report Committee, combined with the efforts of Campus Life Council and the Student Senate through our Executive Departments, will allow us to provide comprehensive recommendations on a wide range of issues for the betterment of our community and for assurances we provide to future generations of the Notre Dame family.

In all of these efforts, the Department of National Engagement and Outreach has been instrumental in providing proper benchmarks and evaluating best practices at other colleges and Universities. Additionally, it has built and strengthened our relationship with the new ACC, one which will be continued for years to come.

We are developing creative, innovative, and effective ways to address the issue of medical amnesty. Because we recognize that while it is our personal prerogative to drink responsibly, we must also ensure that every opportunity is given to students to receive the medical attention that they need.

We are being responsive to the immediate concerns and needs of students. Our Grill the Gov campaign provided a platform for student engagement, constructive criticism, and meaningful contributions. While there is debate on whether or not to pursue Dillon Hall's suggestions of getting rid of their neighboring dorm and Mondays, we are pursuing student ideas on food services and meal plans, alarm systems and call box availability, and sustainability efforts in the winter. We are working with OIT to overhaul the printing system, and are in the process of developing digital signage pilots for easier advertising for clubs and organizations. Our Department of Social Concerns finalized the launch of serve.nd.edu to continue the work of our predecessors, to centralize opportunities for service and justice in our local, national, and international communities. We are following up on a successful Playing for Peace event in Chicago with a Spring event engaging even more campus and local partners.

Through conversations with Mayor Buttigieg, the South Bend Common Council, and various Notre Dame stakeholders, we are in discussions to host the first ever South Bend intern recruitment fair to provide the resources for students to have meaningful and formative internships in South Bend over the summers. This supports our efforts to maintain mutually beneficial town and gown relations.

Student Government is also reestablishing and cosponsoring Tedx UND, and partnering with the University Forum, and other academic forums which bring nationally renowned speakers to campus, and create globally recognized events for the academic community. These events present bold ideas and forums for students to inspire students. Additionally, the Department of Academic Affairs orchestrates the annual Majors Night for Freshman and undecided-major Sophomores. This year's event redefined its goals to include information and representatives for study abroad, research and special program opportunities in addition to all majors and minors.

Congratulations, on your work tonight. The resolution in support of Diversity Council's efforts and recommendations is one more sign that, while we come from different backgrounds, espouse different viewpoints, and find community in different places, we all agree that Notre Dame must be a place where all students can feel at home.

We are reminded of 1st Corinthians: "And if one member suffers anything, all the members suffer with it, or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it." In this vein, we are following up on our recommendations to the Board of Trustees, for greater recruitment and retention of racially and ethnically diverse persons in leadership positions, for institutional commitments to sexual assault prevention, for conversations on transgender students in the University housing system, to ensure that the Rector fund reaches the students who need it, and so that undocumented students will have the resources they need starting in Fall 2014 to feel welcome on campus.

Finally, our peers have called us to a great challenge during this term. When we return from winter break, we will be embarking on a student engagement campaign to a level never before been tried by a Student Government. It is a recognition that for Student Government to be effective in leading there must be direct communication with the Student Body and that we must all take a stake in our environment.

As members of the Notre Dame community, we must pledge to stand up to prevent instances of sexual violence, to speak out against language that trivializes sexual violence, and to support survivors in the process of healing. We pledge to be a positive force in the Notre Dame family because we recognize that when it comes to sexual violence, one is too many. Prayer services are a moment of healing, but are not enough to change the culture on campus – a culture that poses the possibility of victim blaming as a barrier to reporting, that fails to understand consent, and that lacks faith in the system. On this issue, we many times preach to the choir. But sometimes, the choir needs to know how big it is. That's the conversation we are starting tonight at the student only discussion in CoMo. I hope to see you there.

Naysayers reject the possibility for student driven change. I respectfully and adamantly disagree. When we work together, we create a powerful force for students. But, leadership is defined by the actions we take – in our individual lives and through our collective efforts. So, on all of these initiatives, let us continue our work to take ownership over our experiences at Notre Dame and ensure that each student is given an equal opportunity to do so.

Have a restful weekend and a Happy Thanksgiving. Thank you very much for your service to the Student Body.