

# **Final Report of the Election Reform Commission**

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## **What should the process be for the various forms of BSG Appointments?**

We perceive that the appointment process is not working well, because the responsibilities for appointable positions are unclear to applicants; the appointment process itself appears to function well, but job descriptions should be better defined so that potential applicants know what their role might be. For example, the position of Community Service Council Representative has been hard to fill because interested students don't have a clear understanding of what the position entails, particularly given that the perception of their function has little to do with community service. We recommend no change in the appointment process, but rather encourage BSG to review the actual function of individual positions. There may be too many positions and not enough people to fill them, so instead we should focus on finding the appropriate students to fill clearly defined roles.

## **On what timeline should various elections take place?**

The timeline for first year elections is clearly flawed; first-year students need more time in the elections process. They need more time to get to know each other and to learn about the role of the various positions. Students could be given the opportunity to sit in on a BSG meeting to get a better sense of the structure of the group and the roles of individual members. Another option would be to have an open house in the beginning of the year for first years only; it would be crucial to make this a serious endeavour on the part of the BSG because this experience would essentially provide a solid first impression for first years by the BSG. Over half of the first-year survey respondents noted that they did not feel knowledgeable about the candidates in their class elections, and we feel that this sets the tone for a Bowdoin student's interaction with his/her student government for the next four years. The rest of BSG's timeline for class elections works well, and students do not face the same obstacles observed in the first year class.

## **How should the candidacy and campaigning process look?**

The commission feels that the candidacy and campaigning process should provide more substantive education about the responsibilities and opportunities offered by each position before candidates are announced. The current requirement that a candidate receive a certain number of signatures in order to be eligible is not needed; none of the members of this commission have ever seen anyone turned down, and it seems an unnecessary means of filtering potential candidates, especially when candidates are few and far between to begin with. With regard to campaigns, the survey clearly showed a

campus-wide preference for learning about the actual platform of candidate, such as in the Orient, rather than simply seeing signs with that candidate's name around campus.

### **How should the technical side of voting work?**

The commission feels that increasing the length of a voting period from twenty-four hours would facilitate greater participation; furthermore, placing an election over the weekend when students are typically less busy may also increase voter turnout. This measure, along with an e-mail notification, would also presumably help students studying abroad to participate in the process. On the more technical aspects of the voting process, we defer to the unique talents of Will Donahoe, John Connolly, and the BSG Webmaster, to ensure that the system is sustainable year to year; we also recommend a stronger partnership with Information Technology to facilitate a stronger institutional memory.

### **What elections system should be used? Should there be runoffs? Or preferential voting?**

The commission feels that the current system in place is adequate; it is more important to address other more pressing issues in order to increase student participation. Only then would it be appropriate to consider other voting methods.

### **Who should be eligible for the various offices?**

We recommend that BSG remove the requirement that a candidate for BSG President must have served at least one year on the body. The recent trend has been that BSG Presidents have run unopposed; we feel that any competition for this position would be healthy, if only to revitalize the perception that the student body has of the BSG. Opinion was split among survey respondents on whether prior BSG experience was needed to run for president. However, most people who commented were against the requirements. As one put it, "previous service on BSG does not grant someone magical powers to do what it takes." If the student body has no opportunity to actually choose its leader, it increases the divide between BSG and its constituency. We do believe that experience is a valuable asset, given the demands of the position, but we also trust the student body to discern relative ability between candidates.

### **Should Seniors be allowed to vote for BSG officers in the Spring?**

We believe that Seniors should not be allowed to vote in Spring elections. Aside from the obvious consideration that Seniors may be less invested in the democratic process in the spring than in other endeavours, it is our belief that those who will be represented by the BSG should have full say in who represents them.

### **Afterword**

The members of the commission would like to point out that many of the problems we faced had as much to do with the student body's perception of Bowdoin

Student Government as a whole, as they did with procedure and the function of the elections process. It is our hope that providing potential solutions to problems within the elections system may increase student participation in elections, both as candidates and voters; however, the commission thinks it telling that more students participated in the “TV Channels/Gym Magazines” survey (338) than in the survey on BSG Elections (322). We value the work of the BSG, and the valuable role it plays within our community; at the same time, we encourage this body to take a greater role in educating the student body it represents on ways to get involved, thus bridging the gulf between representative and represented.