Good evening. Thank you all for coming out tonight to the State of the College Address. I am Laura Maloney (and I am Justin Rouse) and we are your SGA co-presidents for the 2011-2012 school year. When Justin and I started thinking about the State of the College event this past July, we began talking about how important it was and how we students have underutilized it in the past. The State of the College is really an opportunity for us, the students: for you to have a chance to hear directly what your college and student presidents have planned for the upcoming year and for you to ask questions pertaining to the direction of the college. Tonight of course you will have access to Bro, but Justin and I want to stress that for us, your questions and comments should not end here and instead are encouraged at any time about anything. Shoot us an email or stop us on our way to Miller or even in the sandwich line at Dana. We are here as a resource for you.

Last spring, when we decided to run as SGA co-presidents, we knew we wanted to focus on building bridges among the student body with the ultimate goal of improving student welfare. Last year, we saw an impressive surge of student activism and awareness. We were excited by this spirit and knew we needed to build on the positive energy coming into this year to make Colby a more inclusive, more supportive, and more active student community.

Specifically, Laura and I have outlined four major themes that we will focus our efforts on this year. First, we want to improve Colby-Waterville relations and make downtown a destination for Colby students rather than an afterthought. We will continue the efforts of last year and push for the establishment of an effective gender and sexual diversity resource center. We also see a need to increase school spirit and want to help bridge the gap between athletes and non-athletes on campus. Finally, we have set goals and measures for enforcement of higher standards of accountability and transparency for all members of SGA and specifically, have revamped expectations for dorm presidents. The most successful SGA presidents come to the job with a plan and devote their year working on these initiatives. We began this year by setting out our plan and tonight we want to highlight the aspects of that agenda that have and will continue to motivate us and drive our work throughout this year.

One of our main goals is to improve Colby-Waterville relations. As Colby students, we are members of the Waterville community. We benefit from heading downtown, taking advantage of local shops and restaurants, and giving back to our community.
Already, SGA helped to plan and run a very successful Hill n’ the Ville music festival last Saturday. Five years ago, SGA and Waterville Main Street started Hill n’ the Ville as an opportunity to strengthen the connection between Colby students and the greater Waterville community. Unfortunately, in the past couple of years, the festival lost its buzz on campus and students were just not attending. Laura and I began last spring working to revive this festival and, with the help of SPB, made Hill n’ the Ville an official Loudness event that had high attendance from Colby students this year with the promise of keeping Hill n’ the Ville an ever-growing Colby tradition for years to come.

We are now focusing our efforts on supporting existing programs and new initiatives that engage students in the Waterville community. We are currently working with the Colby Waterville Alliance to get student discounts at local shops and restaurants. Barrels Community Market has already offered Colby students a 10% discount on all prepared foods. Like last year, SGA will be giving away Mid-Maine Chamber of Commerce cards to every student, which gives Colby students access to a variety of discounts and deals such as 10% off food orders at WHOP, Mainely Brews, and the Purple Cow. We are also encouraging student clubs and class presidents to utilize local businesses in their events. We recognize that there are a lot of current initiatives that engage students with the greater Waterville community. Justin and I have already met with the CVC to discuss ways in which SGA can help provide manpower and channels of publicity for their events. We have and will continue to reach out in order to serve as a resource for students and clubs to help support and publicize these initiatives.

Since student welfare is our top priority, we want every student to feel comfortable and safe here at Colby. Last year, student activism exploded, encouraging us all to reevaluate Colby’s adherence to its mission of inclusivity and support. We have promised to take the energy of last year and, through collaboration with PCB and Dr. Tasha Bradley, the new Associate Dean of Students and Director of the Pugh Center, serve as a key resource to support multicultural initiatives on campus. Already, we have rehired junior Berol Dewdney as Colby’s Student Gender and Sexual Diversity Resource Officer. This program began last year and we will work with Berol to continue to support gender and sexual diversity programming and education. She is our point-person for collaboration efforts and serves as a resource to alleviate the burnout of student club leaders, which we on SGA last year identified as a significant problem on campus.

One of our main goals for the upcoming year will be the implementation of the Gender and Sexual Diversity Resource Center. The Resource Center would be a safe space for discussion, programming, and education as well as a much-needed institutionalized support system for issues relating to sexual assault, homophobia, and gender discrimination. We applaud the efforts of everyone who has worked so hard last year and we are excited to play an integral part in the conversations moving forward. Above all, we want to ensure that the efforts to staff and house the resource center adequately reflect the importance of this center. We also want to
focus on being a resource for student clubs. For example, we are working with MAAV, Male Athletes Against Violence, to increase publicity and outreach. Above all, we want to reiterate our commitment to creating a safe and supportive environment for every student at Colby.

Laura and I have also taken steps with SGA to build school spirit. For us, school spirit is about having pride in our community, a community where we all support each other in our extracurricular endeavors. Already, Colby has groups committed to building school spirit. The Student Athlete Advisory Committee, known as SAAC, works to build support for athletic teams. Additionally, at the first meeting SGA meeting, we approved the Mule Mob club. Sophomore Will Hochman explained his vision for this club as one that would expand support for athletic events by building an organized and energized group of students to attend the many games, matches and meet that occur at Colby throughout the year. Already, the Mule Mob has gotten to work by collaborating with the Dean of Students office and SAAC to give away a fan T-shirt to every student in support of Colby Community Day and the first major weekend for home athletic events. In honor of this first big weekend for the sports teams at Colby, SGA is collaborating with SPB, SAAC, the Mule Mob and MAAV to host a tailgate on Saturday to get people out there cheering on their peers – a first step to creating a proud and spirited Colby community.

Although we are launching a massive collaborative effort to build school spirit this week we know that we cannot stop here. Building school spirit has to go beyond the athletic fields of this campus. SGA is committed to creating a community atmosphere where we support all extracurricular activities, not just athletics. We want to work to encourage students to take time out of their week to experience all the great things Colby has to offer. Attend PC Coffee this Wednesday night to engage in an intellectual conversation with your peers or go to a Powder and Wig performance for great entertainment. To encourage more attendance at events on campus, SGA is working with SPB and PCB to develop an online events calendar that will make it easier than ever to find out when and where things are happening on campus. These efforts may be ambitious, as we know Colby students have tight schedules, but they are achievable if you take the time out of your schedule to try something new, to support your peers and create a stronger sense of school spirit at Colby.

Finally, Justin and I know that SGA has struggled at times to hold itself accountable and remain transparent. No SGA can achieve the things we are working on without holding themselves to a higher standard than we have in the past. This year, we have created the position of Residential Life Chair that specifically focuses on strengthening and improving the role of Dorm Presidents on campus. Justin and I believe in the essential role that Dorm Presidents can play in residence hall communities and we remain committed to our efforts to end the era of inconsistent communication and inactivity among your Dorm Presidents. This year’s SGA is lucky to have a group of Dorm Presidents that are engaged and excited to hold their
position and we are confident that the student body will be impressed with their work.

However, SGA’s efforts to improve accountability and transparency do not end with Dorm President reforms. We will continue to reach out to the student body in a multitude of ways in order to seek your input on the issues facing this campus. We are lucky to have senior Raymond Rieling as our Publicity Chair. For Ray, SGA publicity is about communicating to students in a consistent and meaningful way. Laura and I share this vision and are eager for the student body to engage with SGA using our updated website, Facebook page and new Twitter account, @ColbySGA and by implementing other publicity efforts like chalking, banner drops, tabling and consistent surveying. Ray has even joked about getting a bullhorn. By consistently communicating with the student body, we hope to engage you more than ever in our efforts to represent your opinions.

Besides these “big-ticket” issues, SGA has been working on other initiatives that we believe truly will benefit student welfare. We are continuing our Food and Dining Services committee, which works directly with dining services to address student needs and cater (no pun intended) the dining experience to what students want. We will be working with this committee to evaluate the new Dana, to add quicker options to the new take-4 system, to bring back spa bagels with pre-spread cream cheese, and to work toward opening another dining hall on the weekends. Also, under the lead of junior class presidents Erika Hinman and Keith Love, SGA is working to streamline the registered party system in order to make it easy for students to have fun and responsible parties. Finally, in our previous meeting, SGA approved the creation of a committee that will focus on improving student-administration relations.

Tonight is just the start of as great year for Colby. SGA has committed itself to an expansive agenda that will take on several important issues facing our community. Justin and I ran for SGA Co-Presidents because we believe that SGA can have a positive impact on the student experience at Colby. We want to build bridges and strengthen relationships to create a collective experience that ties us together as a college. To us, SGA is conduit for change, that when functioning correctly, can be a catalyst for creating this kind of connected community.

Tonight is one speech, but it is the start of a year-long effort to build a better Colby. A Colby that is more connected to the community around it, more inclusive and understanding, prouder and more spirited than ever before and better represented by its student government. This is your SGA and your Colby experience and together we can do amazing work for our college. That work starts here in this room tonight and we could not be more ready to get to work. Thank you for joining us this evening and here’s to the start of a great year. Thank you.