



Dartmouth
Alumni Council



Alumni Liaison Committee
2022–2023 Annual Report to the
Dartmouth College Board of Trustees

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Introduction

The 2022–2023 academic year was operationally a normal year, though it was also notably a transitional period in leadership with Sian Leah Beilock succeeding Philip J. Hanlon '77 as president. The Alumni Liaison Committee (ALC)—which annually collects and synthesizes the sentiment of Dartmouth Alumni—observed this shift reflected in the 741 emails from alumni that were sent to the Dartmouth Alumni Council. These messages mostly reflected an interest in “evergreen” topics such as academics and administration, along with continued focus on more modern issues, such as Dartmouth’s environmental impact and attention to student mental health. In this report, members of the ALC summarize this sentiment, identifying general themes that emerged across the communications, and noting which topics generated the most reaction from alumni in the prior academic year. And while not raising to the level of major themes, we also include additional noteworthy comments that were important to highlight.

In an ongoing effort to enhance this feedback and provide more timely information to the Board of Trustees and administration, the ALC has conducted proactive, semiannual surveys among our alumni volunteer leaders, including all classes, clubs, affiliated groups, the Alumni Council, and the Dartmouth College Fund head agents. We have orchestrated these “pulse checks” since spring 2021, which has allowed for longitudinal comparisons in sentiment over the past three years. The results are immediately shared with the Board of Trustees so they have a timely sense of alumni sentiment.

Interestingly, topics that are highlighted in the pulse checks, as well as the sentiment that emerged from the broader alumni body, are very similar in terms of key themes and concerns. While we observed a generally positive tone throughout these messages, not all alumni who took the time

Introduction *continued*

to contact the Alumni Council were satisfied overall, as concerns over the general direction of the university and the well-being of students remained high within these communications. In almost every area that warranted significant sentiment, the ALC notes that Dartmouth could improve its communication and handling of sensitive issues, both to reduce confusion and to build stronger connections to alumni. While this report focuses on the sentiment received in 2022–2023, the ALC is pleased to note that many topic areas are being addressed as part of the five key areas of focus that President Beilock articulated in her inaugural address, and no doubt more information will follow.

Finally, a key theme of all feedback this year was the topic of mental health. Given the many messages on this, which comprised almost one-third of all feedback at certain points, the ALC produced a [snapshot report](#) which was delivered to the Board in January 2023 to highlight this concern. Much work has already been achieved in this area by the Board of Trustees and administration.

It has been my profound pleasure to work with members of the ALC this past year, including Alumni Council President Chitra Narasimhan '92 and President-Elect Alex Barnett '07. I am also grateful for the work of the staff on the Volunteer Engagement Team in the Alumni Relations Office, particularly Vice President for Alumni Relations Cheryl Bascomb '82, Senior Associate Director Mariah Farbotko GR'18, and Senior Director of Volunteer Engagement Carolyn Kimberlin. Lastly, I offer my appreciation to the Dartmouth administration and Board of Trustees for their thoughtful engagement with the ALC, including Senior Vice President for University Advancement Bob Lasher '88, Board of Trustees Chair Liz Lempres '83 TH'84, and Board Advancement Committee Chair Ellie Loughlin '89.

For Dartmouth,

Laurie Shapiro '95
Chair, Alumni Liaison Committee 2022-2023

Alumni Liaison Committee Membership



Laurie Shapiro '95
Chair



Missy Asbill
Attridge '77 P'07



Alex Barnett '07



Terra Branson '10



Belinda Chiu '98



Latia Curry '98



Munir Haddad '93



Chitra
Narasimhan '92



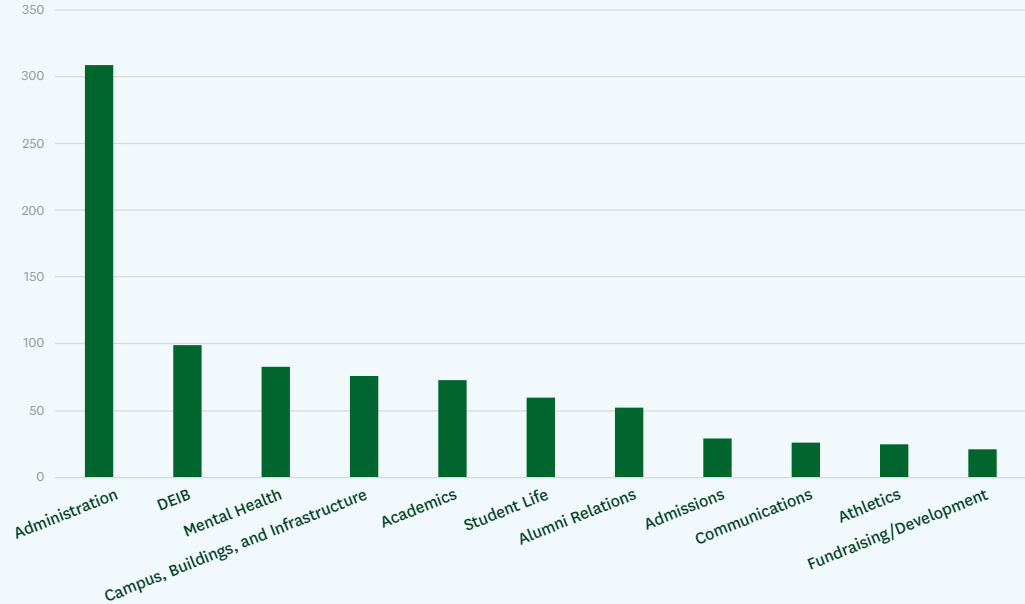
Cheryl
Shepard '90



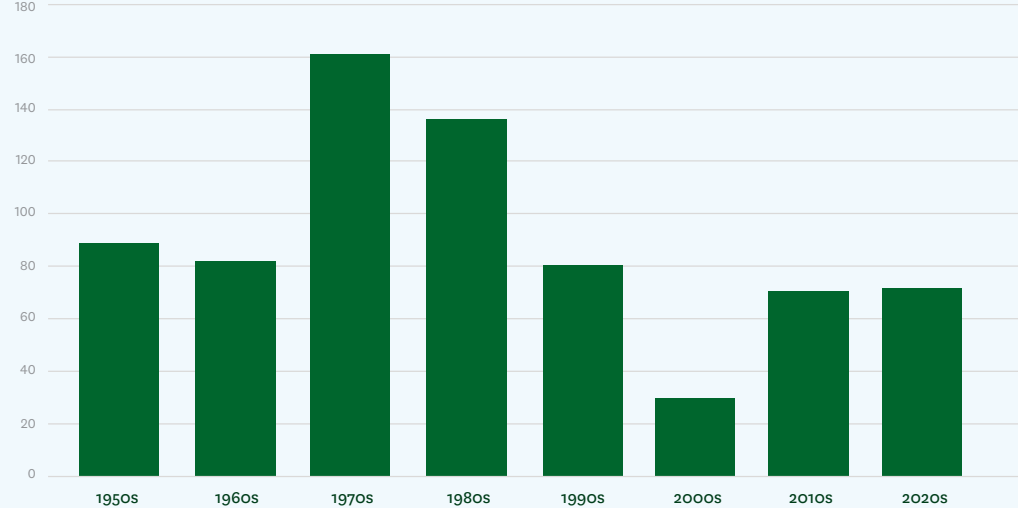
Soyeun Yang '16

In 2022-2023, the ALC heard feedback from all decades on a variety of topics.

Distribution of Messages by Primary Topic



Messages Received by Class Decade

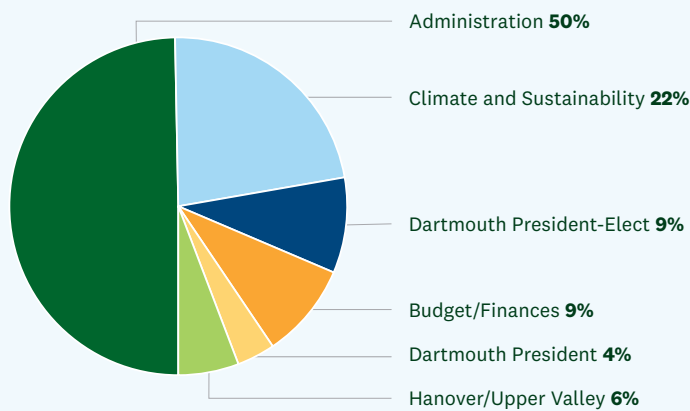




Administration

The topic of administration was far and away the topic that received the most voluminous comments, comprising 38 percent of all feedback. However, ALC notes that this is also the broadest and most wide-ranging topic, and we've endeavored to break out the sub-themes for greater clarity.

Administration Topic Breakdown



Optimism Towards the New President

There was generally positive sentiment towards the appointment of President Beilock as the first female president in Dartmouth's history. The majority of comments expressed optimism in response to the announcement and a hope that she has been set up to succeed. There were some questions raised about her lack of connection to Dartmouth and, as a result, concern over her long-term commitment to the College.

"I am excited to see Dr. Sian Leah Beilock, a fantastic and talented personality, take the helm of the College. I think she is superbly positioned for the job." –Class of 1982

Concerns Over Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression continues to be a major theme and on the forefront of alumni concerns. Specific alumni sentiment calls for allowing more conservative speakers to be welcomed on campus and creating an environment that promotes and celebrates open dialogue across many viewpoints to Dartmouth adopting the University of Chicago Free Speech Principles. Some commentary goes further to denounce a perceived leftist agenda in the classroom and curriculum that serves to emphasize certain viewpoints above others.

“My main concern is to ensure that the College’s basic principle of free and open discussion and discourse, with all ideas and concepts subject to challenge, support, and disagreement, be preserved.” –Class of 1969

Commitment To the Liberal Arts and Undergraduate Teaching

Another key theme centers on Dartmouth’s commitment to its focus as an undergraduate teaching college versus a large research university. Many alumni seek assurance that the undergraduate emphasis on the liberal arts that has been a hallmark of the Dartmouth experience does not get lost when speaking about growth of enrollment, expansion of institutes, and focus on research. This extends to a need for a clearer definition of the Dartmouth value proposition, especially as we seek to distinguish ourselves from other peer institutions.

“Please encourage Dartmouth to focus on what it does best, which is to be an elite COLLEGE that provides an extraordinary undergraduate experience in the liberal arts. The more Dartmouth seeks to become a university, the more it will guarantee a slide into mediocrity.” –Class of 1990

Concerns Over the Growth in Administrative Costs

Many alumni expressed concerns over the growth in non-academic overhead costs. There is a belief that staff has grown disproportionately over recent years, contributing to administrative bloat. This has led to a call for transparency around such costs.

“Could Dartmouth please be more transparent about its administrative budget? Many schools are struggling to reverse the decades-long proliferation of administrators, the ratio of administrators to tenure-track faculty, and the ratio of administrative salaries to tenure-track faculty salaries. What is Dartmouth doing to reverse this trend?” –Guarini alumnus

Negative Sentiment Around the Rising Cost of Tuition

Related to the overall growth of costs, there was negative sentiment around the overall cost of tuition among colleges in general and Dartmouth specifically, lamenting the impression on the part of elite universities that higher tuition (even with robust financial aid) is a sign of higher prestige. Questions were raised about whether Dartmouth could be a leading voice in reducing the cost of college tuition which in turn could encourage a wider cross section of students to apply. There was concern about the changes to the FAFSA form, our relatively low number of Pell Grants, and the likelihood that our sticker price might keep many promising students from even considering Dartmouth.



“Our tuition was slightly less expensive than most Boston and New York schools and now we’re outpacing them, and although ‘aid’ is great, the headline tuition and fee number is scaring off admitted high school students... as well as some students from even applying. I hope [President Beilock] is committed to slowing expense growth because the quality ‘middle class’ student is being scared off.” –Class of 2006

Sustainability as a Core Principle of Dartmouth’s Strategic Mission

Several respondents noted optimism after Presidents Beilock’s and Hanlon’s email about Dartmouth’s sustainability goals. However, most respondents believe that Dartmouth could be far bolder in its mission and embrace specific goals such as following through on the commitment to divest from fossil fuels, becoming carbon neutral long before 2050, reducing carbon emissions on campus, and educating future scholars and citizens on green topics. A few respondents expressed hope that with President Beilock leading the university, climate and sustainability would be elevated to a critical strategic priority alongside mental health.

A majority of alumni responding on this topic noted that building a bolder vision would require greater urgency, visibility, and resourcing, such as more personnel dedicated to defining and tracking against targets, prompt renovation of old housing stock and energy-inefficient buildings, creation of more robust coursework, and more frequent and action-oriented communication to the public about Dartmouth’s commitments. Several respondents felt strongly that the pace of addressing sustainability topics is an active deterrent to prospective applicants and could greatly erode Dartmouth’s stature within higher education.

“If Dartmouth intends to be in a position to lead over the next 100 years, it needs to start showing the way *right now* with respect to the fundamental challenge of our time. From my perspective, Dartmouth’s climate-related communications have seemed focused on not making waves with the Irving Institute rather than discussing and taking action on the very difficult questions of climate pollution reduction. The university could show a new level of commitment to these crucial issues of energy and climate by elevating the responsibility for this crucial part of our mission to a VP or SVP, and by dramatically increasing the staffing and funding. Like many alumni, I look forward to supporting Dartmouth in its vigorous efforts to reduce (both quickly and dramatically) its emissions and its overall footprint, instead of being a critic.” –Class of 1983

Improving Town Relations

Some alumni expressed concerns about the state of town relations. Dartmouth would improve its image and help lessen the economic inequality in the area if it invested in schools beyond our immediate counties, assisted with community redevelopment in areas that have deteriorated, and helped ensure affordable housing and transportation in Lebanon and White River Junction. Less adversarial and more constructive efforts to communicate and collaborate with the greater Upper Valley would serve all.

“[The President of Colby took] the view that ‘as goes Waterville, so goes Colby’ and made big investments in downtown Waterville, including moving some student housing downtown and subsidizing restaurants.” –Class of 2011 Tuck School

Additional noteworthy comments:

1. A better understanding of the Office of Transformation and its revenue-producing opportunities is needed, given it has further added to administrative costs.
2. Given the return to post-pandemic social life, there is renewed concern around sexual abuse, excessive alcohol/substance use, hazing, etc. as it relates to Greek life and to re-evaluate/return to the work done to study the problem and the recommended mitigating actions.
3. Further information and clarification were requested on the unionization of Dartmouth graduate students.

GOING FORWARD

Alumni remain very invested in Dartmouth’s administration and operations. When possible, greater transparency around financial decisions and policy changes would provide clarity for alumni and reduce assumptions.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

There was significant alumni sentiment on the topic of DEI, and this was often interrelated with the administration topic discussed above and the academic topic discussed below.

Diversity of Opinion Foundational to DEI

Alumni were concerned with academic freedom as it relates to diversity of opinions alongside diversity, equity, and inclusion. They spoke to a perception that voices outside the established “liberal” canon are unable to be heard.

“My pet peeve is that ‘diversity’ seems to be measured only by the physical characteristics of the faculty and student population. I believe character and diversity of thought should be recognized and celebrated as well. The College still seems to have it in for conservative freedoms of thought and speech. (BTW, I think we should call it ‘free debate,’ which implies that listening is part of the bargain.)” –Class of 1966

DEI Pitted Against Excellence and Merit

Some commenters pit diversity, equity, and inclusion against merit and excellence, as an either/or proposition rather than concepts that can and do co-exist.

“...as the mantras of diversity, equity, and inclusion have swept academia, basically replacing the ‘old’ concepts of excellence and merit...” – Class of 1959

“It is a Marxist ideology that ‘equity,’ for example, dictates an equal outcome of mediocrity. Merit, ability, and effort are lauded, yes, but only if the results of such are the same for all regardless of the disparity of individual input.” – Class of 1963

Additional noteworthy comments:

1. An economic argument was raised in a complaint about DEI, i.e. expansion of administrators’ increased overall cost.
2. A comment was made that there is an inherent hypocrisy in an institution that promotes white (and male) administrators but a diverse student body.
3. There were concerns raised about faculty needing to affirm their commitment to DEI in the hiring process and graduate students (at Geisel) needing to do the same.
4. Comments were noted that rights for LGBTQIA+ alumni in New Hampshire have very recently come under attack by the New Hampshire state legislature on two fronts (the attempt at banning gender-affirming care and the bill which would require school officials to out trans youth to their parents, both presented in March).

MENTAL HEALTH

As previously mentioned, mental health was an ongoing theme of all feedback received throughout the year, and as a result, the ALC produced and shared with the Board a separate [mental health snapshot report](#) in early 2023 to delve into this topic in greater detail. Following the snapshot report, 32 additional messages were received that built on and further contextualized the report’s five key themes: a perceived lack of resources and support, suicide, mindfulness and wellness, transparency around data and communication, and culturally relevant resources. As before, many of the messages touched on multiple themes.

While there was still an overall sense that Dartmouth’s well-intentioned initiatives are not moving quickly enough, there was also a desire to offer expertise and advice to help Dartmouth lead the way. Alumni courageously shared their own personal stories, their professional experiences, and their urgency to be part of building a healthier community.

“I am impressed with the dedication and seriousness of the administration on addressing mental health issues on campus and I love all of the things that Dartmouth is currently doing.” –Class of 1982



GOING FORWARD

Given the Alumni Council's focus on this issue over the past several years, the ALC was delighted to learn of President Beilock's priority to center mental health and wellbeing across the university. Continue to share frequent communications with alumni on what and how resources are deployed to address student mental health.

CAMPUS, BUILDING, AND INFRASTRUCTURE

More than 70 responses touched on Dartmouth's emphasis on tradition, particularly as it relates to its architecture, as well as a desire for more information and insight into the plans for campus housing and expansion.

Preserving the Look and Feel of Dartmouth's Campus

Alumni expressed concern around the development of new, modern buildings beginning to chip away at the look and feel Dartmouth's campus has been known for. There was a sense that the campus is becoming "too overbuilt," with some speculation that these new buildings fulfill a plan to be more a graduate school focused research campus.

"Stop building modern buildings in our northern New England setting—they look out of place and are muddling the ivy-clad traditional aesthetic of the college." –Class of 2021

"I'm very concerned about the great increase in concrete and the drop in trees in/around Hanover. Dartmouth used to be a place where you were 'away' and connected with the woods of NH, but that is hardly the case anymore, and the plans to construct lots more buildings, and remove even more green space (how's that for a double entendre...) is not taking things in the right direction." –Class of 1979

Upgrading and Planning for Dormitories

Alumni expressed concern around the need to “upgrade living conditions” on campus. After residing on campus during reunions alumni were struck by the disrepair and outdated looks of the older dorms. They also noted that many amenities, including laundry machines, were inoperable in some locations. There was also a loud objection to the dormitory building near Lyme Road (which has since been resolved by the announcement on Sept. 27).

Additional noteworthy comments:

1. Some alumni called for a more specific long-term plan regarding campus expansion (especially as it relates to plans for increased enrollment) and an update vis-à-vis the last plan that was published in 2020: “Planning for Possibilities, A Strategic Campus Framework.”
2. Questions have been raised around the legal controversy over the \$3.8 million alumni donation to support the golf course and Dartmouth’s stand on this matter.
3. Feedback was requested on the effectiveness of the housing clusters in creating a greater sense of community and social opportunities.

GOING FORWARD

Transparent and proactive communication is needed regarding the overall expansion plan for campus enhancements.

ACADEMICS

The promise of a world-class liberal arts education

In line with feedback received on the administration’s commitment to the liberal arts, many submissions explicitly referenced the academic experience and expressed concern that Dartmouth is straying from its commitment to providing students with a premier liberal arts education. Alumni attributed this to a variety of factors, including Dartmouth’s perceived efforts to become a large research institution and an overemphasis on “woke” viewpoints and eschewal of dissenting voices in academic and other settings on campus that prevent the true study of the liberal arts.

“Am I a crank if I say I’d like to hear more about academic excellence? We used to hear ‘this is how we are going to be the best liberal arts college/university for undergraduates in the nation.’ Does that even register anymore? Talking about diversity and mental health as if they are a substitute for academic excellence is disappointing and exhausting.” –Class of 1990

Additional noteworthy comments:

1. A concern was expressed over the reported decline in the number of students participating in foreign study, language study abroad, and similar programs, meaning fewer students are gaining the enriching experiencing of viewing the world from other perspectives.
2. There were calls for the establishment of an Asian American Studies concentration or major, which, many alumni stated, would have a positive effect on the mental health of Asia American Pacific Islander (AAPI) students, as they would see themselves reflected in the curriculum and feel a sense of belonging. They also argued that creation of an Asian American Studies concentration or major would benefit the entire community, helping all community members better understand the historical experience of Asian Americans.
3. Questions were raised about extending the Dartmouth educational experience online, similar to the much larger online presence of other Ivies in platforms like edX.org or Coursera, which would increase and scale Dartmouth's profile.
4. As an outgrowth of conversations with student leaders at the fall Alumni Council meeting, the issue of needing to add class medians to the student transcript was raised as this is a major stressor for students already completing a rigorous coursework.
5. In a coordinated effort, several recent graduates wrote about Professor Patricia Lopez and the impact of her being denied tenure in 2023, which, they wrote, touched their personal and academic experiences and professional pursuits after college.

STUDENT LIFE

Over a third of the 40 respondents flagged their concern over the campus experience, specifically in community-building opportunities and substance abuse and sexual violence caused by a lack of strong alternative social options. Despite the introduction of housing communities in 2016, a number of alumni and parents note that the experience is inconsistent at fostering an alternative social space for students, both first-year students and upperclassmen alike..

“I have been a little disappointed in the first few weeks of the freshman term [with regard to] the UGA experience. I feel like I did a lot more with my UGA group than my daughter is doing. I have heard from several other of her classmates who feel similarly. I know there are housing clusters now which are supposed foster camaraderie. Perhaps as the term goes on it will become more evident that this is the case. I think more however can be done in the first few weeks to help kids find people to go to dinner with etc.” –Class of 1989, Parent of '26

“Dartmouth needs to focus on providing more in-person social experiences to its students to increase social connection and community, and decrease isolation and screen time for students—proven factors for depression and other mental health issues. I don't believe Dartmouth has to reinvent the wheel here. Use the Hop as a community hub for social connection through all kinds of arts and entertainment activities and

put financial resources into those efforts and programs, some of which already exist, but some can be newer, like broadcasting college-run radio from Top of the Hop, hosting student-run music festivals during summer, collaborating with athletics and the orchestra for dances, etc. Crowdsource student ideas and build more community among the students on campus with fun in-person social events.” - Class of 1992

“My historic concern is the failure to adequately deal with substance abuse in general, and alcohol in particular. I abused the latter while at Dartmouth, and my classmate [redacted for anonymity] attributes his alcoholism to his experience at Dartmouth as well. I suspect little has really changed in this regard since our days in Hanover, but if there are metrics that indicate otherwise, I would be interested. As with many problem areas, education is the key, and I encourage our alma mater to increase same with respect to alcoholism and addiction. [It] should be a part of every freshman’s curriculum.” –Class of 1960

GOING FORWARD

Several alumni suggested the need for a more holistic strategy to community-building on campus that encompasses multiple channels (e.g., dorms, Hop, Collis, housing communities, freshman floors, and Greek houses) and addresses the broader goal of improving student emotional and physical wellness. Other key ideas included funding and publicizing more interest-oriented programs (e.g., student-run music festivals, arts/entertainment activities), re-introducing BarHop (a broadly adopted and popular weekly social event from 2016–2018 that was cut due to funding), and restoring the tight-knit, in-person programming core to the Dartmouth experience prior to the pandemic. Ten respondents noted the need for stronger and safer community-building, particularly to reduce campus suicides, substance abuse, and sexual violence.

ALUMNI RELATIONS

Not surprisingly, our alumni are engaged in the topic of being alumni, and there were comments on a variety of issues, including tools to enable engagement and in-person meetings of alumni volunteers.

“I’d like to appreciate the ongoing communication through the alumni channels. It has helped me stay updated with the latest news about the campus! Thank you.” –Class of 2015

The Need for Enhanced Tools for Alumni Engagement

Alumni want tools that are easy to use, citing iModules as particularly clunky. The continued use of the dartmouth.edu email addresses, a college-run portal with standard templates and helpful links, and digital yearbooks/reunion books were among the many tools cited.

“I think in this modern era, it is important for alumni classes to have a robust, actively and frequently updated website and digital communications system. I believe we would see an improvement in alumni engagement and participation, including donations, if it was easier for alumni to stay in touch with their class and with class and campus activities. A one-stop shopping site where they can see what is happening with their class and with the college and interact and give feedback.” –Class of 1971

Fostering Alumni Engagement

Many alumni volunteers (VOX, Club Officers, Alumni Councilors, etc.) expressed frustration at not being able to conduct their annual meetings in Hanover and believe this is a missed opportunity to meet, network, and connect with fellow alumni.

“A few of us on the COAEB challenged the leadership about this shift to virtual meetings. It’s “more inclusive” they say and “cuts costs.” It is also going to result in lessened engagement from alumni volunteers. Dartmouth has always been a leader in alumni engagement, and gatherings on campus have contributed to that. The takeaway from past VOX and COW weekends has been ENERGY and INSPIRATION and ENTHUSIASM and a RENEWED PASSION FOR THE COLLEGE. That energy will dissipate and volunteer ties to the College will weaken. The elimination of in-person VOX etc is a message to alumni volunteers that the College does not value us or our service.” –Class of 1981

In addition to alumni leaders wanting a resumption of in-person meetings, alumni expressed concerns with respect to the staffing in Alumni Relations as it related to reunion planning and other events, specifically whether there was enough staff to handle the volume of work.

Additional noteworthy comments:

1. The Class of 2016 is especially disheartened to miss their fifth-year reunion due to COVID reunion cancellations.
2. Feedback also noted it would be helpful to extend career services personal interactions beyond the current five years.

GOING FORWARD

Alumni’s desire to reconnect with one another and resume in-person meetings and events has been a consistent topic of feedback since the waning of the pandemic. It may be worth monitoring whether alumni engagement is impacted by reduced in-person offerings and, if so, what steps should be taken to address this.

ADMISSIONS

Admissions is an evergreen topic among alumni, and there were wide-ranging views on the use of equity in admissions. Although almost all feedback came before the Supreme Court’s June decision in the Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. cases, the issue of equity/diversity/preferences were raised by several alumni. There were strong and differing opinions on the topic.

“I hope that Dartmouth will cease its unconstitutional treatment of students and revoke its equity policies . . . [and conform with] the Court’s logic that each person must be treated equally, not under equity.” –Class of 1983

“[I]t is important to continue to admit an appropriate mix of candidates... [while] recognizing the importance of giving preference to the children of engaged alumni.” –Class of 1982, parent of ’20

“Dartmouth is failing to show a true commitment to social equity, and instead is just another among the herd of higher education institutions investing in their amenities to attract [more privileged] students.” –Class of 2011

Additional noteworthy comments:

1. Several experienced alumni interviewers hoped that the Admissions Office might more clearly elaborate on what, in today’s world, constitutes an outstanding candidate so they might provide more constructive interview feedback.
2. Some alumni questioned the necessity of a COVID vaccine requirement as eligibility for admissions (for both undergraduate and graduate school).
3. There were a few questions about when Dartmouth would return to SAT/ACT testing as an admissions requirement.

ATHLETICS

Several commenters stated that while President Hanlon worked to improve athletic facilities during his tenure, he diminished the program overall. They said attempting to eliminate popular teams, mishandling the golf course, and reducing the number of recruited athlete slots in admissions have caused our competitiveness in athletics to suffer—especially as compared to other Ivies.

“Dartmouth stresses excellence in all aspects of student life—academics, the arts, extra- and co-curricular activities, etc.—and in most cases delivers. But in athletics, the administration doesn’t seem to care if the experience these student-athletes have is less than excellent. Our competitiveness with other Ivy athletic programs has been pathetic, with just a few exceptions. [Soon] we will not only lose outstanding student-athletes to other schools, we will begin to lose outstanding coaches. Something must be done to reverse this trend.” –Class of 1968

Additional noteworthy comments:

1. Athletes are forced to develop time management, teamwork skills, and fitness practices that amply demonstrate that not all learning in college occurs in the classroom. This should be fostered and supported as part of the student experience.
2. There appear to be a lack of recruitment/support of Black athletes in sports that are predominantly white.

GOING FORWARD

As this report reflects the prior academic year's feedback, it is important to note that many of the topics presented were announced as areas of priority for President Beilock during her inauguration last month, particularly mental health and wellness, free speech, climate change, and housing. Alumni have expressed optimism about President Beilock's arrival throughout the past year, and her vision for the future of Dartmouth seems to closely align with the topics of concern we hear about most from alumni.

In addition to the suggestions through this report, going forward, the Alumni Liaison Committee recommends frequent and clear communication surrounding presidential initiatives, so alumni feel connected, informed, and heard. The Alumni Council represents alumni in all areas of engagement, including classes, regions, clubs, and affiliated groups, among others, and can be utilized to help disperse this critical information wherever possible.



