



Alumni Liaison Committee Snapshot Report: **Mental Health**

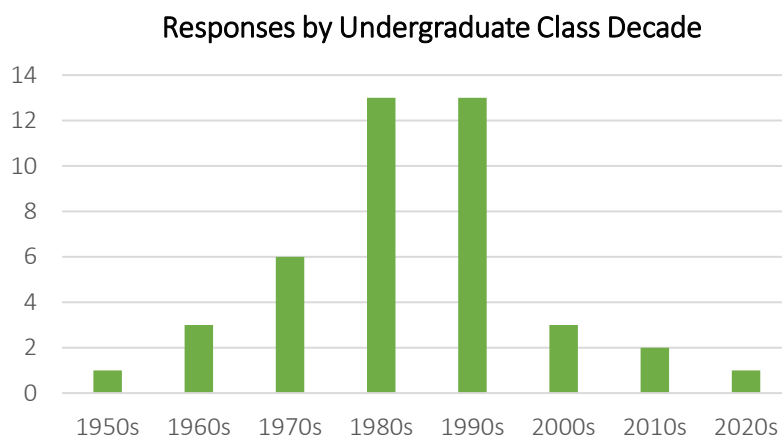
Student mental health has long been a priority and concern of the College and its alumni body. Heightened pressure for achievement and perfection – exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, racism and civil injustice, wars, and global instability– has had a destructive impact on student mental health. The crisis has swept the nation, and Dartmouth is not immune. With multiple student suicides in the span of several months, the need to address mental health became even clearer.

In the 2021-2022 ALC Annual Report, 21% of messages about Student Life called for urgent attention and proactive action to boost mental health resources. This is a high percentage of responses on a single topic, so the ALC continued to monitor sentiment in this area. Since July 2022, the ALC has received 48 messages about mental health from alumni, making up 23% of all messages received. Additionally, in Fall 2022 the ALC conducted a pulse check survey with alumni volunteer leaders to get a sense of current alumni sentiment. The results of the survey mirrored those of the general alumni population in demonstrating a clear concern for student mental health. The overall tone of all messages received was one of genuine worry, eagerness to offer support and advice, and urgency for proactive measures. There was also healthy frustration with Dartmouth’s current responses and handling of the crisis.

Summary of Key Themes

Within the messages received on the topic of mental health, five key themes emerged: a perceived lack of resources and support, suicide, mindfulness and wellness, transparency around data and communication, and culturally relevant resources. Many of the messages touched on multiple themes, so the percentage assigned to each theme exceeds 100%.

The majority of responses (88%) were from undergraduate alumni, with class years spanning from 1956 through 2022. A small percentage of responses also came from professional school alumni, as well as one current staff member/graduate student.



1. Support/Lack of Resources

Almost two-thirds (63%) of the emails addressed the need for more investment and support for mental health. Many alumni expressed deep frustration and for some, anger, about the College's handling of various situations. There also seem to be inconsistencies across the school's policies and approach.

"I am our class (1974) president. We are preparing for our 50th reunion and have connected with the Class of 2024. They have shared with us their ongoing mental health concerns. Based on what has been told -- the concerns need more than casual attention. This is an area where Dartmouth could lead. What is being done?" – Class of 1974

"I am not at all surprised by the recent tragedies and they are consistent with my experience at Dartmouth which included very limited support and a focus on protecting the institution vs individuals... Since graduation I know of multiple other instances in which students at Dartmouth and Geisel more specifically have been attacked, pushed out of school, or left on their own with mental health challenges. Dartmouth as an institution was and apparently still is deeply uncaring." – Geisel Class of 2017

While a few acknowledged the College's efforts with the JED Campus Program, Headspace, Uwill, and the Day of Caring, there remains healthy skepticism about their effectiveness and the College's overall level of commitment.

"I am sure you all know about recent suicides on and around campus. This is a cry for help on behalf of the students I work with. So far, Dartmouth has organized a Day of Caring, which I think is great. But according to my students, the high-stakes, fast-paced, and very competitive Dartmouth culture is what is stressing them to the breaking point. As alums, you have the influence to effect positive change. I don't have an answer, but I really hope Dartmouth can make some big systemic changes that will address the mental health of our students, faculty, and staff." – Staff Member and Current Graduate Student

2. Suicide

59% of respondents highlighted the recent suicides on campus in their messages. Responses came from alumni of the College, professional schools and graduate programs, and faculty members. Most of the respondents linked the suicides to mental health issues and the lack of support services for students, while others made connections to the COVID-19 pandemic and the perception of an isolating and pressure-driven culture at Dartmouth. One respondent went so far as to provide a detailed description of how they felt the College pushed students with mental health issues out of the school system, based on their own experience. Most respondents acknowledged the difficulty in tackling such a complex issue but expect Dartmouth to emerge as a leader in this space.

"I am really concerned about the recent spate of suicides on campus. The administration has underestimated the impact of the pandemic on students, although issues around mental health and wellbeing extend further back beyond the start of the pandemic. Beyond simply providing mental health services, as a sociologist I urge the college to look at structural issues

around the pressure students feel to perform academically, athletically and socially on campus, and cultural issues around how students socialize, ways in which students feel 'outside' the dominant Greek culture on campus and how to address these. We need to look at root causes instead of putting band-aids on bullet wounds.” – Class of 2014

3. Mindful Dartmouth/ Wellness Center

About a quarter of the responses (24%), including coordinated alumni organizational efforts, called for a more “Mindful Dartmouth,” urging Dartmouth to prioritize wellness as a critical part of the student experience. Many of the emails spoke to the creation of a Center and/or appointment of a Dean of Wellness and noted this is an opportunity to lead and innovate, rather than be reactive.

“In addition to Academics and Athletics, WELLNESS should be the third pillar of the College. Dartmouth has an opportunity to both help our students and alumni - as well as take a leadership role in the world - to transform how WELLNESS is a prioritized, well-funded, crafted program... A CENTER FOR WELLNESS building could be a rallying point if this needs a building for the College to focus. You can't be Basecamp to the World, if our students aren't mentally strong let alone 'just ok!'” – Class of 1990

4. Transparency/ Data/ Communication

About a quarter (22%) of responses spoke to the need for greater transparency and information sharing about what is happening on campus and the actions being taken to address mental health. Alumni expressed their commitment and willingness to cull from the expertise of the alumni body to support Dartmouth in these endeavors. The Class of 1991, for example, is creating a subcommittee to focus their class project to support such efforts.

“We need more transparency re mental health issues on campus! Without violating privacy or decorum, what is going on? Four deaths in a month is brutal, sorrowful, and of deep concern. The more we know, the more we can help!” – Class of 1956

5. Culturally Relevant Resources

20% of the correspondence came from leaders and members of the following affiliated groups, who worked together to address mental health concerns in underrepresented populations:

- DALA | Dartmouth Association of Latino/a/x Alumni
- DAPAAA | Dartmouth Asian Pacific American Alumni Association
- NAAAD | Native American Alumni Association of Dartmouth
- BADA | Black Alumni of Dartmouth Association
- DGALA | Dartmouth LGBTQIA+ Alum Association
- WOMEN OF DARTMOUTH

Appendices I and II highlight the joint effort of these groups and their call for more formal input and feedback in mental health policies and services, including more culturally relevant resources, funding, and required programming to support students and alumni. These notes detail suggestions that could benefit the entire student and alumni body, inclusive of access and support that is available to, and reflective of, underrepresented groups on campus.

Going Forward

Dartmouth is at an inflection point on the topic of mental health, and there is great interest and urgency from the alumni body for Dartmouth to become a leader in supporting mental health initiatives, both during and after students' time in Hanover.

“Dartmouth can be a world leader in this space, not only in helping students while on campus, but also preparing them with the tools when they enter the world after their undergrad careers. It’s a unique opportunity for Dartmouth in its location in Hanover to do something really interesting and impactful!” – Class of 2000

Alumni are incredibly passionate about this topic, and over a third (33%) of responses offered ideas and suggestions for the College to evaluate. Many of these topics were covered at the Fall 2022 Alumni Council meeting, which gave Alumni Councilors the opportunity to probe more deeply into the challenges and possible solutions.

- Programs and Resources
 - Sponsorship of a seminar or seminar series on mental wellbeing
 - Creation of a Center for Wellness and hiring of a Dean of Wellness
 - Strengthening of mentoring, counseling, and advising programs (noting these are different services)
 - Creation of personal coaching program
- Coordination with other stakeholders
 - Fortification of faith-based communities
 - Joint initiative with the medical school and other academic departments with the knowledgebase to holistically address mental health
 - Engagement of alumni and students to draw from experts in the community
- Financial resources
 - Financial support for sufficient on-campus staffing and resources for off-campus providers (Note: The Call to Lead has raised money and allocated resources for this express purpose, but alumni note that more needs to be done)
- Policies
 - De-stress periods over the course of the term
 - Overhaul of medical leave policies to make it easier for those who need support
 - Pass/fail freshman fall or freshman year
 - Requirement of mental wellbeing participation (Note: The ALC is aware that this is a recent addition with the change of the traditional swim requirement)
 - Rethink the addition of median grades on transcripts
- Communication
 - Communicate and confirm that students can access the various resources/programs available, which will remove the disconnect between perception and reality of resources

The ALC recommends sharing institutional perspectives and changes with the broader alumni body on a regular basis. In fact, the topic of mental health was a prevalent theme of the Fall 2022 Alumni Council meeting, and the honest and genuine conversations during that session gave Councilors much needed information to report back to their constituents. As a result of that open conversation,

for the first time in the Fall 2022 pulse check survey the ALC saw some tempered comments about the College's efforts to address mental health. However, how the administration moves forward on addressing this topic and sharing policy changes will be critical in moving toward more positive alumni sentiment.

APPENDIX I

Letter from Affiliated Group leaders

Dear Dartmouth College,

These past 18 months have been filled with so much grief. We are grateful for the resiliency of our community.

Now more than ever, we understand the need to offer support to one another in order to thrive on campus as students and beyond as alumni.

We especially want to recognize and honor the lives of the Dartmouth students recently & tragically lost this past year:

Elizabeth Reimer '24
Beau DuBray '24
Connor Tiffany '24
Lamees Kareem '22

We are aware that student well-being was on the Board of Trustees' September agenda. It is our recommendation that mental health be included in the College's Climate & Culture Initiative (C3I) as testimony to Dartmouth's commitment to take on some of the most urgent issues facing humankind.

We have heard many concerns from current students about the insufficiency of mental health services during these extraordinary times and want to partner with the College in bringing solutions to the table. [Just 30% of members of the Class of 2021 reported satisfaction with the College's mental health resources.] To that end we have put together a list of interventions (accretive to the JED Campus Program) which we request that the College vet & implement as appropriate to support students (faculty + staff) who are struggling with mental health:

1. Alumni and students to be formally involved and consulted with in deciding and reviewing mental health policies & services (i.e., JED committees). There are experts in the community and this feedback loop can help ensure effective user-focused outcomes.
2. Well-trained mental health staffing proportionate to the student body demand. Stories of students in crisis having to leave voicemails, waiting a month to be seen or being relegated to 1hr/week support is an unacceptable risk to student welfare. We are encouraged by the recently announced same-day guarantee of care for all urgencies.
3. Culturally relevant instant access resources including telemental health that's mobile & remote. [e.g., Healthy Gamer, Lean On Me p2p at Northeastern, Talkspace, Better Now Health, ShockTalk for the indigenous community, Shine, etc.]
4. A curated list of Upper Valley counselors that are College insurance-approved plus local transportation to access services.

5. A fund exclusively for students to receive financial support for mental health related issues. [The Call to Lead]

6. Overhaul of failing medical leave policies that force students to involuntarily withdraw and exit campus due to mental health related issues vs. consider accessible education accommodations per federal law. The policy does not account for issues like lack of resources at home, harmful home environments, or disconnect from support networks on campus and often does more harm than good. [Dartmouth failed the 2018 Ruderman Family Foundation assessment of LOA protocols.]

7. Mental wellbeing & selfcare as a proactive 4-year fitness curriculum requirement introduced at orientation akin to PE & SVPP. [e.g., Headspace, 10% Happier, mindfulness, art therapy, a wellness center, residential counselors assigned to housing communities, etc.]

Mental health is an ongoing issue that has been exacerbated during the global pandemic. Yet, it definitely did not originate in 2020. Many former students have struggled with mental health while at Dartmouth and the College to date has not offered sustainable modern-day solutions for students to heal and recover on campus. It is disappointing to hear that students are discouraged from seeking help as they sense that the College's short term counseling model & medical leave tactics are prioritizing liability, reputation, and funding over student welfare.

Inadvertently, failure to meet this healthcare crisis exposes the College to a potential characterization of punitive negligence (illegal, discriminatory treatment). As settled in a lawsuit against Stanford brought by Disability Rights Advocates in October of 2019, students with mental illness are protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act and must be provided accommodations.

Considering the pervasive nature of these challenges, it would behoove the College to examine the aspects of Dartmouth culture contributing to helplessness which can lead to despair. While mental illness is not unique to Dartmouth (nearly 40% of students experienced depression in a 2020 national study Healthy Minds), the College has an opportunity to lead among its peers by turning its naturally remote backdrop into a life-giving strength.

As the isolation & upheaval of the global pandemic takes its toll, we wish to ensure that the College step changes its approach to mental health in order to provide meaningful support that prevents tragedies and equips the Dartmouth leaders of tomorrow with lifelong learning designed to protect emotional health and drive Dartmouth distinction.

We welcome a dialogue in community,

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APPENDIX II

Letter from the Affiliated Groups Roundtable

I stand with the affiliated alumni in my concern for the MENTAL HEALTH state of affairs on campus. Additional counselors, the Headspace mindfulness app & Uwill teletherapy are great steps in the right direction as recommended in 2021. But the underlying issues raised in the attached remain largely unaddressed a year later. Significant change that future-proofs the Dartmouth community requires aggressive investment & resourcing in a more MINDFUL DARTMOUTH, including a stand-alone Center for Wellness and programming.

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