

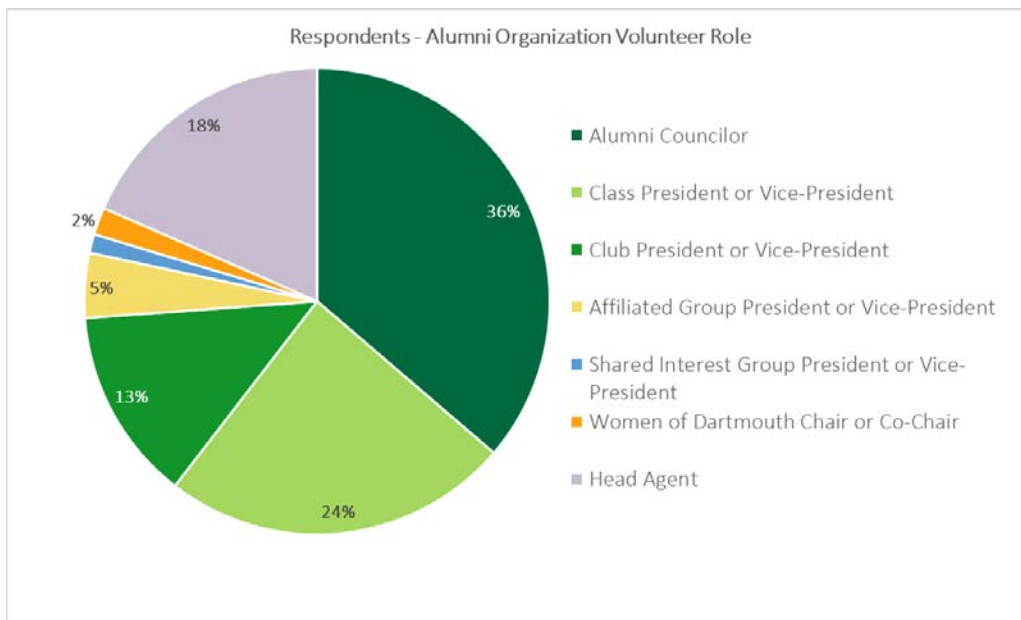
Alumni Liaison Committee Report: May 2023 Pulse Check

Background/Survey Structure

Since March of 2021, the Alumni Liaison Committee has fielded simple “pulse check” surveys 1-2 times per year to class and club presidents and vice-presidents, Women of Dartmouth leadership, affiliated and shared interest groups, head agents, and members of the Alumni Council. The survey was designed to assess the volume and tenor of alumni sentiment as represented by alumni leaders, who, given their broad networks and leadership roles in our organized alumni groups, are in an excellent position to articulate alumni questions, comments, concerns, and feedback.

This short survey has asked the same questions for each of the 4 deployment timeframes (March 2021, April 2022, November 2022, and May 2023) to provide longitudinal results and perspective. Since the Fall Pulse Check survey in November of 2022, we have added a fixed-response question as well as an open-ended opportunity, which has provided valuable insights into the exact nature of the sentiment.

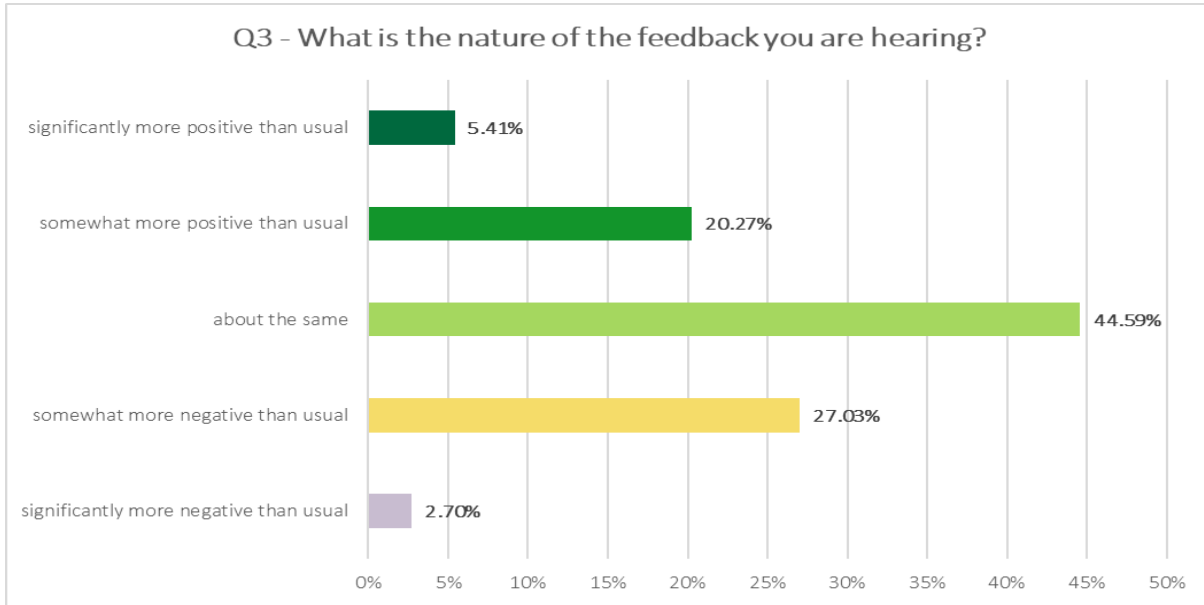
The May 2023 pulse check was distributed in early May to 673 alumni leaders and was open for two weeks. The response rate was higher than the Fall 2022 survey – 182 leaders, or 27%, responded versus 122 (18.6%) in November. The mix of respondents shifted slightly away from alumni councilors (down 4 points) to more club and affiliated and shared interest group leadership.



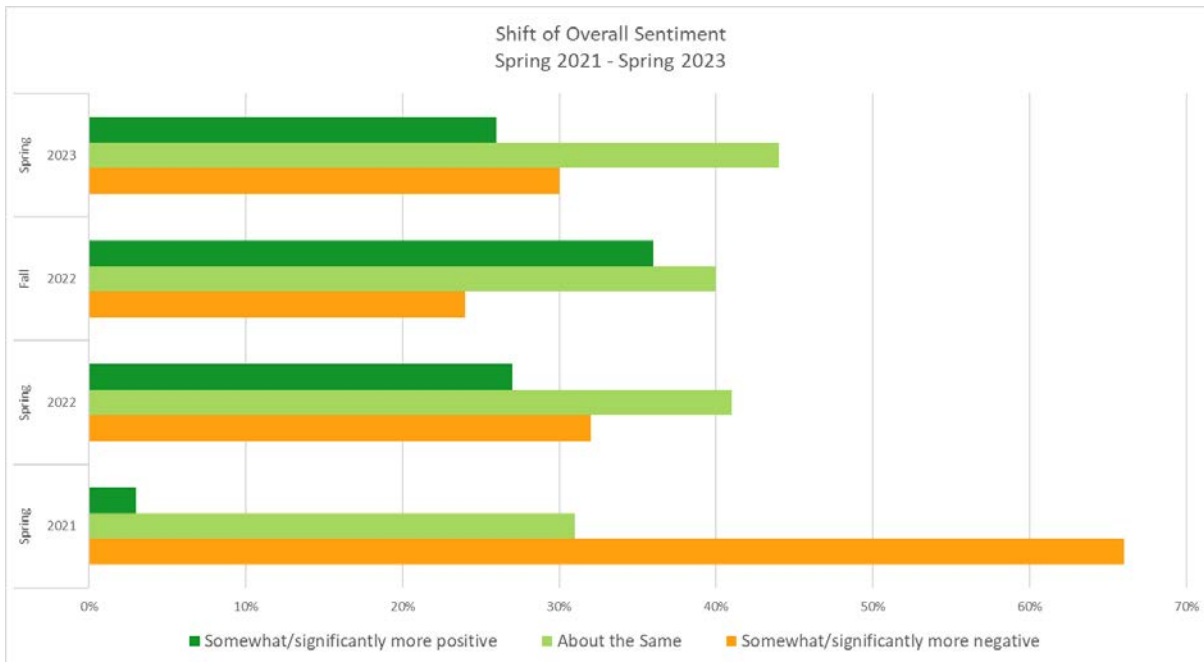
Quantitative Results

About 87% of respondents state they have heard some form of feedback (down 4 points from the Fall 2022 survey). The nature of that feedback, either in total or when thinking about the past 6 months, is in absolute terms balanced between positive and negative, but that also represents **an overall shift to**

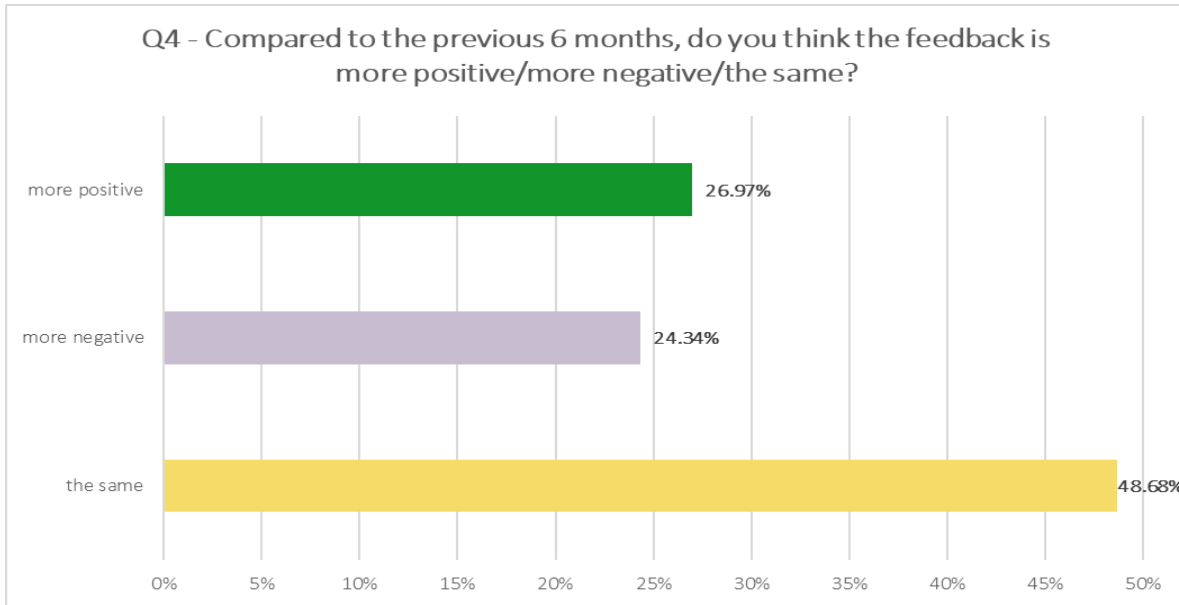
the **negative** as compared to the Fall 2022 survey. When asked about the nature of the feedback generally received, almost 26% of alumni leaders stated the feedback was either significantly or somewhat **more positive** than usual, which was a **10-point decline** versus the fall. Almost 30% of respondents stated the feedback they heard was somewhat or significantly more negative than usual; that number was only 24% in the fall.



In comparing the trend of Question 3/the tenor of alumni feedback that volunteer leaders are hearing over time, and despite a dip in this latest survey, we have certainly seen a marked improvement from the low of spring 2021, when outcry from the mental health crisis and campus suicides, COVID-19 restrictions, and Athletics decisions were reverberating in all corners of the Dartmouth community.

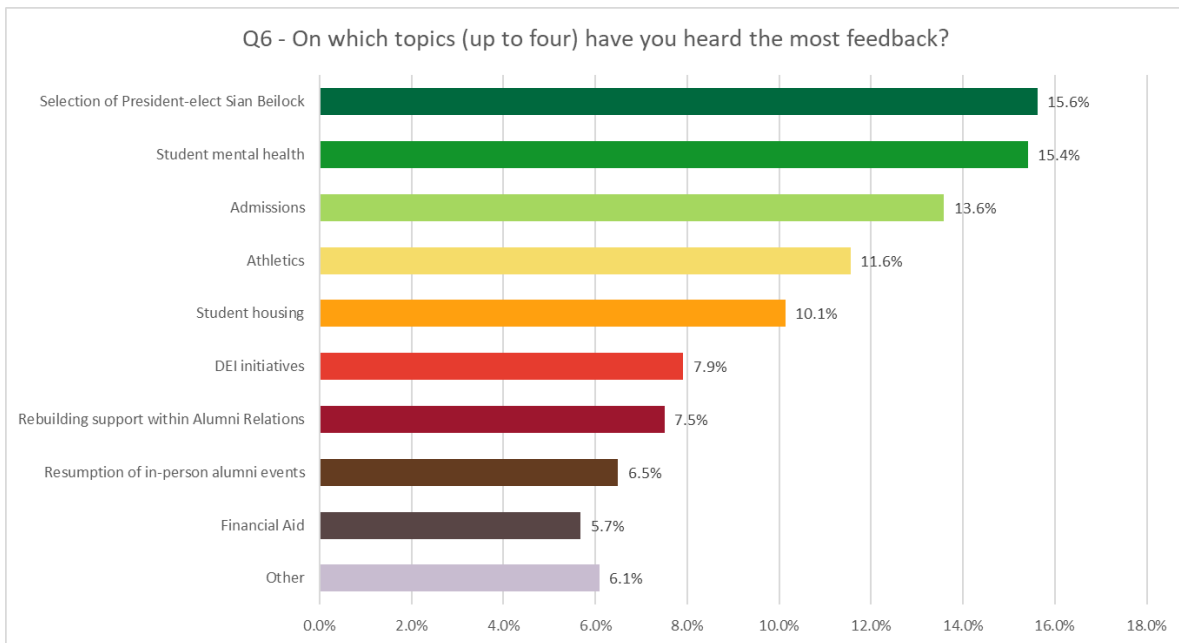


Another survey question, added in the Fall 2022 survey, asked respondents to focus only on the last 6 months and consider how the tenor of feedback has directionally changed in that shorter time period. This was more equivalent between being more positive (27%) versus more negative at 24%. Again, 24% more negative is a significant shift from the fall 2022 survey when only 14.9% said it was more negative.



Qualitative Feedback

The survey provided alumni leaders the opportunity both to select up to four topics that are garnering the most feedback within their alumni networks, as well as to comment on the primary reasons for the change in alumni feedback/sentiment in open-ended questions.



The following is a summary of the key themes and noteworthy areas:

- Just like in the Fall 2022 Pulse Check, when asked, “On which topics (up to four) have you heard the most feedback?” the **selection of Sian Beilock** was the top selection at 15.6%, and 51 open-ended responses were also given. As before, the nature of the comments was overwhelmingly positive but not as substantive as in the fall; instead, comments were simpler, like “buzz about the new president” and “a great deal of excitement about Sian,” but not more detail.
- **Student mental health** was the next most-heard-about topic at 15.4%, but as we reported in the Fall 2022 Pulse Check, the sentiment continues to evolve from strongly worded concern (or outrage) to a more measured optimism that the College has made this a priority and is addressing it through resource and action. The nature of the sentiment still characterizes mental health as a “concern” and an “issue,” but “improved communication [to alumni] about [the College’s] focus on mental health” has quieted the volume of comments. Let us be clear: this in no way means that the alumni community is satisfied with or no longer invested in this topic. Several alumni voiced a “disconnect between what the administration thinks it is supplying and the students' perception that more is needed to address the [mental health] crisis.” Therefore, continued updates on actions and evidence of tangible, positive change in the climate of the campus should remain part of Alumni Council updates for continued dissemination to the greater alumni community.
- Coming in 3rd (13.6%) for quantified topics was **Admissions**. The open-ended comments on this topic fall into two categories. The first is growth. The sentiment is neither positive nor negative but is best described as musings and questions about the imbalance between applicant numbers and class size, our ability to “keep up” with other Ivy League competitors, and long-term vision/strategy/resource feasibility to address growth. The second category of sentiment expresses alumni frustration in legacy admission decisions and the impact it has on alumni giving. While not new, the sentiment is more vocal (and negative) than previous surveys.
- **Athletics** ranked high in the topics that alum leaders have heard from their constituents. Most comments continued to express dismay at the overall poor record of Dartmouth’s various teams and “...hope that several of the athletics departments (baseball, softball, hockey for women and men) can become much stronger. It is hard to watch the standings and have Dartmouth at the bottom. We need to be at least competitive in all sports.” On a positive note, alums are still pleased with Mike Harrity’s hiring and believe he can create needed turn-around in the athletics program.
- The frequency of comments related to **housing and student life** was less than compared to the Fall of 2022. The focus of these comments, however, has shifted away from the North campus initiatives (although still mentioned) and is centered more squarely around the lack of infrastructure such as no on-campus food options after a certain time, general dorm disrepair, possible dorm space shortages, need for mindfulness spaces, etc.
- Although coming in 6th place when asked to select four topics about which alumni leaders are hearing the most, **DEI initiatives, heavily intertwined with concerns about free speech and the suppression of conservative views**, garnered the second most open-ended comments at 37, and most were negative. Alumni sentiment continues to fall into the two themes the ALC surfaced in the Fall 2022 survey, but with more pointed commentary. These are:

1. Is Dartmouth “doing diversity for diversity’s sake” or do we know what “good looks like” and will we be able to measure and express results? Several comments used almost the exact same phrasing, namely there seems to be “an overemphasis on DEI.” Other commenters went farther in worrying that Dartmouth, “...like virtually every other college or university (public or private) in the country, has embraced enthusiastically and unquestioningly DEI and all its tenets and mantras” and that there seems to be “...a lot of [DEI] senior hiring, strategizing, and name changing but no doing.” Although Shontay Delalue and Chloe Poston’s conversation with councilors at the 226th Alumni Council meeting (which took place after this survey) was very positive and addressed many concerns, their work is still at the strategy phase, and alumni are impatient for tangible initiatives that yield tangible outcomes.
 2. Does DEI only equate to the more “politically correct” areas such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic opportunity, and as a result are we shutting out (legitimate and appropriate) diversity of thought? Many comments cited “the perceived stifling of conservative ideas on campus” and a “growing concern that our college is becoming an echo chamber where only one [far left] viewpoint is allowed.” It seems as if DEIB is viewed as “zero-sum” by some alums versus a construct that can improve representation and belonging for all. President-Elect Beilock’s statements at Alumni Council – regarding brave spaces and the imperative that schools such as Dartmouth must nurture the broadest spectrum of views and thought – were incredibly well-received. A “Sian Beilock tour” is a tremendous idea, but also addressing fact vs. fiction when it comes to free speech may be extremely helpful for a future Alumni Council session. For example, perhaps the economics department can analyze activities or sentiment on campus to present a more realistic view of free speech and its tenor. Professor Bruce Sacerdote presented a few years ago at Alumni Council on media bias/sentiment which was fascinating, and a similar type of conversation could be revealing.
- The 3rd highest concentration of open-ended comments (behind Sian and DEI) was regarding **supports within Alumni Relations and in-person alumni volunteer events**. There is great frustration among our alumni volunteer leaders who do not feel supported, especially among class/club leadership, as VOX has gone completely online. One contributor expressed the sentiment well when they said, “Zoom is just not cutting it, and I worry about motivating other classmates for succession planning purposes. Our current volunteers/officers feel disengaged from or unsupported by the College, and they are talking about it with other classmates.” Alums do not understand why in-person has gone away which adds to their frustration. Recommendations of hybrid meetings, paying for the events/weekend, etc. have been made as they are expressing a deep importance for connection and incentive. “Given how much we rely on volunteers and the challenges we face in recruiting volunteers, we need to pay attention to this.” The ALC would strongly recommend re-establishing some form of in-person meeting for class/club volunteers or, barring the feasibility of that, more transparent communication as to why that is not possible.
 - The **bequest controversy regarding the golf course** received a fair number of comments and also garnered renewed calls to reopen the golf course. One alum put it best when they stated, “The issue of the bequest to support the golf course has reopened the dissatisfaction about closing and eliminating the golf course and added to it the concern about the college not honoring the intended use of the bequest and not returning it or following the family’s wishes for alternate use

of the bequest.” They concluded with suggesting, “Perhaps a discussion on both the legal and alumni relations aspects of the decision would be useful.” Dispelling perception about “reneging on promises” may go a long way to rebuild trust and understanding in this area.

- The call for an **Asian American Studies program** resurfaced with requests as to a status or better explanation as to why such a program has not been supported at Dartmouth.

The ALC hopes this report provides a good representation of alumni sentiment for President-Elect Beilock as she takes office in a few weeks and begins to shape her priorities and direction for the College under her leadership. It is important to keep in mind, however, that this Pulse Check survey is sent to alumni volunteer leaders only, and therefore may skew differently from all-alumni feedback. The ALC’s annual report will encompass all feedback received through the 2023 fiscal year to provide the widest possible view.

Nevertheless, alumni seem focused on most of the same issues that have engaged their attention over the past year – mental health, DEI, admissions, housing and student life, athletics, and alumni volunteer experience – but it is the emphasis or degree of concern that has shifted in the last 6 months. Assuming focus continues on mental health initiatives and on-campus student life, addressing how free speech and diversity of thought fit into the greater DEI mission and strategy and determining how best to support our alumni volunteers seem to be the two areas where the College has the best opportunity to impact alumni sentiment in positive ways.

Summary of Recommendations

- For mental health initiatives, continued updates on actions and evidence of tangible, positive change in the climate of the campus should remain part of Alumni Council updates and be shared with the broader alumni community.
- A “Sian Tour” to allow alumni to hear first-hand her perspectives and priorities, with particular attention on the importance of diversity of thought and free speech.
- Utilize faculty research resources (perhaps the economics department) to analyze activities or sentiment on campus to present a more realistic view of free speech and its tenor on campus.
- Continue to expose alumni to the DEI team and conversation where possible, but especially when concrete activities or initiatives are announced.
- Regarding the issue of the golf course bequest, some additional transparency or communication around this decision would be helpful (where legally possible/appropriate) to dispel hearsay.
- Re-establish some form of in-person meeting for class/club volunteers or, barring the feasibility of that, more transparent communication as to why that is not possible.