



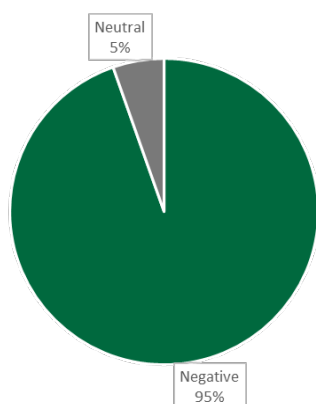
## Alumni Liaison Committee Snapshot Report: **Athletics Decision**

November 20, 2020

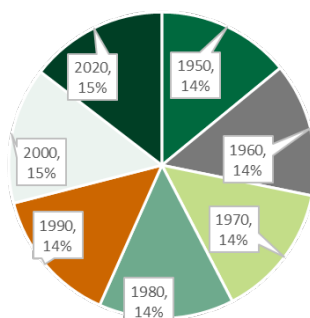
In early July, President Hanlon announced to the Dartmouth community the difficult decision to eliminate several varsity athletic teams and permanently close the Hanover Country Club. Five varsity teams were eliminated: men's and women's swimming and diving; men's and women's golf; and men's lightweight rowing. The rationale for this decision was to better balance the makeup of incoming undergraduate classes as well as to help ease a budget deficit made worse by the pandemic. The news release can be found [here](#). In the wake of this announcement, the Alumni Council has received feedback and sentiment from alumni expressing dismay and disappointment.

The Council has received 261 messages from 117 alumni (and 2 parents). Of those, 95% were negative in tone and condemned the team eliminations. 5% were neutral, expressing questions about the rationale for and impact of the decision. Correspondents included all generations of Dartmouth alumni and were 62% male. Roughly half of the emails came from alumni affiliated with swimming or diving teams.

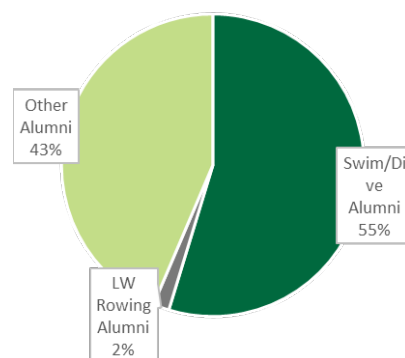
*Nature of Sentiment*



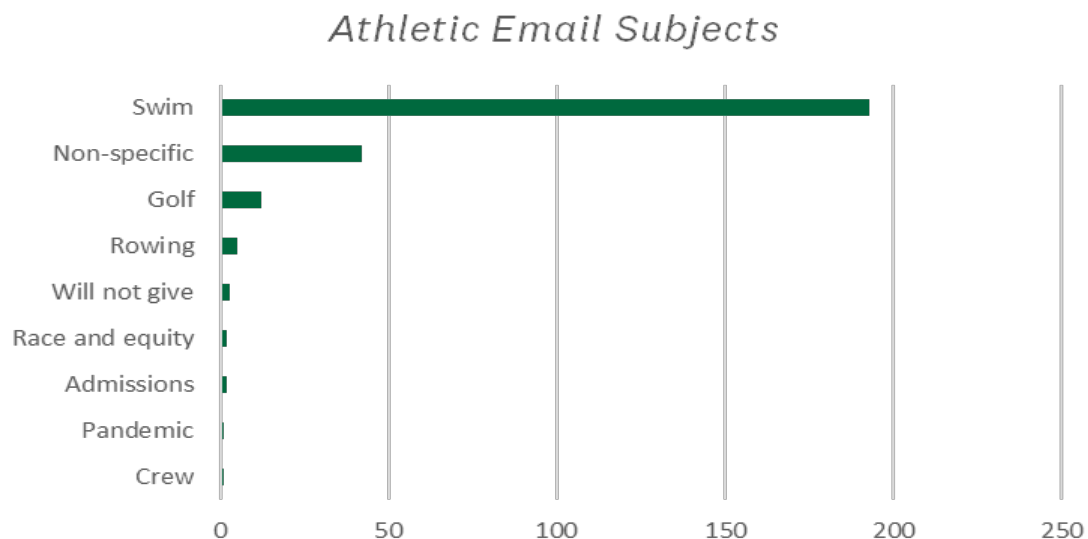
*Senders by Decade*



*Correspondent Affiliations*



Most sentiment (69%) received focused on the swimming and diving team eliminations, while some expressed concerns about golf and the closure of the Hanover Country Club and rowing.



Many of the messages received were templated communications sent to Alumni Councilors by concerned alumni, the result of coordinated outreach by *Save Dartmouth Swim and Dive*, a group of alumni, coaches, and friends of the teams (see Appendix I). In emails both templated and not, several themes emerged:

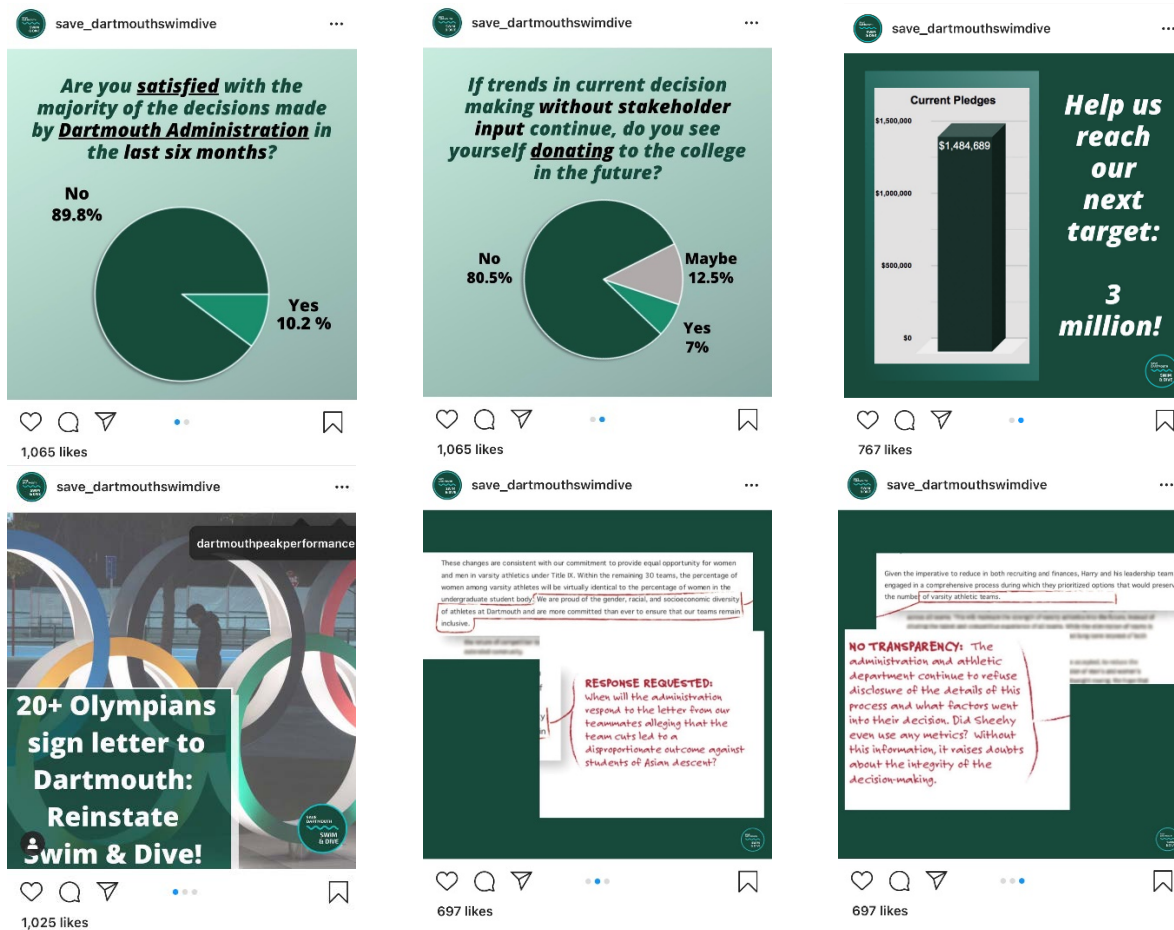
- Views that athletes and coaches were treated unfairly, and being stereotyped as one-dimensional and not able to excel in pursuits outside of athletics
- Concerns about lack of transparency at Dartmouth in general and with how the elimination decisions were made specifically
- Belief that in eliminating the swimming and diving teams, Dartmouth is discriminating against Asian Americans
- Perceptions that the eliminations accomplished relatively little (saving \$2MM and freeing up 20 admissions slots) while disproportionately harming 110 student athletes
- Opinion that promises were made to alumni and athletes by Dartmouth's leadership and subsequently broken (specifically swimming and diving)
- Opinion that the community should have had the chance to share opinions before the decisions were announced

### **Social Media**

In addition to the sentiment received by email, the ALC was invited to follow the Instagram account @SAVE\_DARTMOUTHSWIMDIVE. The posts below demonstrate some of the activities undertaken by this group, which include calling negative attention to the decisions, publicly decrying statements made by Dartmouth's

leadership, fundraising for the effort, and highlighting potential fundraising implications for the College.

They have reached thousands of viewers and the group has secured support for their cause from Olympic athletes, fellow Dartmouth athletes, and others.



## Student Response

In addition to the feedback on the Athletics team eliminations provided by students and alumni of the effected teams, response has not been positive from other student athletes and athletics alumni. In late October, members of 20 athletics teams wrote to President Hanlon and Athletic Director Harry Sheehy regarding their support for the teams that had been eliminated (see Appendix II).

## Alumni Council

In advance of the Alumni Council meeting in October, there was the hope that College leadership could hold an information session to address alumni constituent concerns that many councilors had received. Unfortunately, because the Board had not yet had a chance to respond to requests from student athletes and supporters, the session was

not able to be held. Council President Rachel Bogardus Drew '98 did provide a follow up email to councilors detailing the criteria for the decision and the Board's recent response to the earlier requests.

## **Summary**

It has been unusual to see such a coordinated campaign to bring sentiment on one topic to the Council to share with Dartmouth leadership. Although the nexus of sentiment sits with alumni of the eliminated teams, there does seem to be concern from other alumni as well. The coordinated efforts of the Save Dartmouth Swimming and Diving Group particularly have called national attention to Dartmouth's decision to eliminate teams. It is of note that other institutions such as Brown and Stanford have announced similar decisions this past summer. Some alumni commented that those institutions took a more compassionate approach in allowing a full year of competition before dissolution of the programs.

At the time this report was finalized, the Board issued a public statement upholding the Athletics decisions. However, the Council continues to receive feedback on the topic, with similar themes of disappointment and frustration at the perceived inability to secure details about the rationale for the decision. In addition, both alumni and parents continue to be active on social media to express their grievances.

## **Appendix I**

*Templated emails received by multiple Councilors from multiple constituents in advance of the 221<sup>st</sup> meeting of the Alumni Council*

*EXAMPLE 1:*

Dear [NAME],

I know that there is an upcoming Alumni Council meeting and I am writing to you as there is an urgent matter that desperately needs your attention. Phil Hanlon appears to have single handedly initiated a plan to reduce the number recruited athletes at the college which will fundamentally alter the make up of the student body. While you may not completely agree with the views of the alumni swimmers, athletes and parents who oppose this change to the college, I do want to make sure that you are at least well armed with the latest information in order to convey the view of your constituents. In particular:

- the culture of secrecy that pervaded the process
- the lack of dialogue from President Hanlon to those who have questioned his changes

- the deeply flawed methodology that was applied by Harry Sheehy. In particular, he starved the Swim Team of recruitment slots relative to Ivy peers and then used “past success” and “future potential success as a metric!
- the disproportionate impact on Asian Athletes with a 50% reduction in Varsity Asian Athletes
- the completely unethical behavior of Athletic Director Harry Sheehy in attempting to rob the coaches of their severance pay
- and most of all, why? It is still not clear what is reason why Phil Hanlon insisted in reducing recruited athletes, which is leading to a fundamental shift in the make of the Dartmouth community - and this is something that EVERYONE should at least care about and question.

At a minimum, we are asking that the Alumni Council vote for an independent review of this process. Let me know if you have any questions regarding the above and if so, when might be a good time for a brief chat.

Kind regards,

[NAME]

*EXAMPLE 2:*

Dear [NAME],

I was pleased to learn that a special session has been added to the Alumni Council Meeting program in which Athletic Director Harry Sheehy and Deputy Director Bob Ceplikas will address the elimination of the five varsity teams. Thanks to you and other AC reps for helping make that happen.

I think it would have been appropriate to include President Hanlon in this session to address significant outstanding questions about his mandate to reduce athletics recruiting spots in admissions by 10%, which I understand was the original driver resulting in the ultimate decision to eliminate the teams. To date, he has only been willing to provide superficial rationale for his mandate: that it was done in order to “achieve the right balance between applicants who are accomplished in athletics and applicants who excel in other pursuits.” Did Hanlon even review Sheehy’s decision to eliminate the varsity teams?? It appears to me that the result of the decision would be the opposite to what Hanlon said he wanted, e.g., swim team members couldn’t be more exemplary in their ability to be well-accomplished in athletics AND to excel in other pursuits. I hope that you and other AC representatives will continue to push President Hanlon for more adequate disclosure about this.

But, there are certainly significant questions that Sheehy and Ceplikas might address as far as their role in deciding to eliminate the five varsity teams. Here are some questions that I have. If they do not address these in their presentation, perhaps you may be able to ask them during Q&A:

1. Did you participate at all in the decision to reduce athletics recruiting spots by 10%?
2. To what extent did the Dartmouth Athletics Advisory Board participate in choosing teams to be eliminated?
3. What evaluation criteria did you use in deciding which teams to eliminate? In light of President Hanlon's stated rationale (about "achieving the right balance"), did you consider the average Academic Indexes of recruited athletes in the various sports, or their academic achievement or community service at Dartmouth?
4. What consideration was given to diversity in selecting teams for elimination? It appears that 50% of Dartmouth's Asian athletes will lose their opportunity to participate as a result of this decision.
5. To what extent were teams evaluated as successful based on their won-loss records? Was any adjustment or consideration given to the quality of competition? (In swimming and diving, the Ivies have the best Division 1 teams in the Northeast – in a sport that is very popular globally, and in which the U.S. is consistently the world's best.)
6. Mr. Sheehy, you illustrated [in your Wearers of the Green presentation] the relative advantages and disadvantages in recruiting spots that our varsity teams had relative to their Ivy competition, and you showed that eliminating a few teams that are already at a disadvantage would avoid exacerbating their situation. But, why were certain teams at a disadvantage to start with? And didn't this simply set them up for elimination based on this recruiting disadvantage criterion (as well as the historical success criterion)?
7. Did you consider the number of "walk-ons" on the various team? These are athletes who would lose the opportunity to participate in their sport even though they did not take a recruiting spot. In swimming, because of the large numbers of talented athletes relative to recruiting spots, there are a significant number of very serious, talented athletes who gain admission without the benefit of a recruiting spot. They often contribute significantly to the program. They are among the most worthy admissions applicants, and would go elsewhere if Dartmouth no longer has a team.

Thanks again for all you're doing on behalf of alums and the College.

Best regards,

[NAME]

*EXAMPLE 3:*

Dear [NAME],

I hope that the July decision to eliminate five varsity teams will be scrutinized at your upcoming Alumni Council meeting.

As a former swimmer, I was really shocked by the decision – especially when I learned that the driver that led to it was the decision to reduce recruiting spots by 10% in order to “achieve the right balance between applicants who are accomplished in athletics and applicants who excel in other pursuits,” as President Hanlon put it.

Aside from being troubled by Hanlon’s statement in and of itself (which suggests that athletes are one-dimensional and generally unable to excel in other pursuits), it’s hard for me to imagine how the elimination of the swimming and diving teams helps achieve a better balance in the student body. These student-athletes couldn’t be more exemplary in their ability to be well-accomplished in athletics AND to excel in other pursuits.

As a college focused on educating tomorrow’s leaders, Dartmouth should not be de-emphasizing athletics. Participation in athletics at a high level (varsity) teaches so many of the important character-building lessons that our future leaders need, like perseverance, sacrifice, teamwork, resilience, courage and passion. These cannot be learned in an academic classroom setting.

I am further disappointed that the administration would make a decision that changes the character of the student body in this way under cover of COVID, and with little opportunity afforded to alums and the students-athletes affected to have a voice in the decision.

Respectfully,

[NAME]

**Appendix II**

Letter from Dartmouth Athletics Teams sent October 29, 2020

#OneDartmouthTeam Demands College Reinstate Cut Teams

Dear President Hanlon and Athletic Director Sheehy,

As members of the Dartmouth athletic community, we stand united with the recently cut Swimming and Diving teams, Golf teams, and Lightweight Rowing team. We are disappointed that student athletes were not consulted to help solve the fiscal and admissions challenges the school is trying to overcome before you unilaterally committed to eliminating these 5 teams.

We believe student-athletes are a catalyst for recruiting a wide variety of talented students to attend Dartmouth. We strongly disagree with your view that recruiting more non-athletes will improve the Dartmouth experience. Athletes are talented and capable members of the community, and their contributions are even more valuable through the fostered teamwork and leadership. Athletics, like other extracurricular activities, provide environments that cultivate strong character and shape us into well-rounded members of society. Your decision tears those opportunities away from over a hundred of our peers.

Your actions have also done permanent damage to Dartmouth's ability to recruit in good faith. Why would a student-athlete commit to Dartmouth in any sport if we cannot keep the promise that they will be representing the Big Green for the entirety of their college career?

We are concerned about the manner in which this decision was made. We believe providing transparency into decision-making processes would have invited students and alumni to help identify better solutions than what was arrived at in secret. Transparency in such a dramatic decision is paramount, and without it, our leaders forgo accountability, which is exactly what we are seeing.

We urge you to open a dialogue and include student voices to find a more creative solution than cutting entire programs and robbing your committed athletes of their well-rounded Dartmouth experience. We are calling on the College and its athletic department to find the courage to rethink their decision, provide transparency, and find a more equitable solution to their problems with admissions numbers and financial distress. Eliminating these five programs was an ill-considered determination in the face of a solvable challenge, and as such, we demand that the athletic department reevaluate their decision and reinstate the Men's and Women's Swimming and Diving Teams, the Men's and Women's Golf Teams, and the Lightweight Rowing Team.

We are #OneDartmouthTeam.

Sincerely,

Dartmouth Football

Dartmouth Men's Lacrosse

Dartmouth Heavyweight Rowing

Dartmouth Lightweight Rowing

Dartmouth Men's Squash

Dartmouth Men's Tennis

Dartmouth Men's Nordic Skiing

The Players of Dartmouth Women's Basketball



The Captains of Women's Cross Country

Dartmouth Women's Field Hockey

Dartmouth Women's Ice Hockey

Dartmouth Women's Lacrosse

Dartmouth Women's Rowing

Dartmouth Women's Skiing

Dartmouth Women's Soccer

Dartmouth Women's Softball

Dartmouth Women's Squash

Dartmouth Women's Tennis

Dartmouth Club Fencing

Dartmouth Club Skating