



Dartmouth
Alumni Council



Alumni Liaison Committee
2021–2022 Annual Report to the
Dartmouth College Board of Trustees



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Introduction

The 2021-2022 academic year saw the resumption of many of Dartmouth's traditional programming and activities following the global COVID-19 pandemic, as the College sought to find its new normal in the post-pandemic world. Dartmouth's alumni acknowledged this period of transition, expressing appreciation for the continuation of old traditions mixed with new perspectives on the College and its place in the world.

The Alumni Liaison Committee (ALC) — which annually collects and synthesizes the sentiment of Dartmouth Alumni — observed this shift in the 456 emails from alumni that were sent to the Dartmouth Alumni Council. These messages reflect a resumed interest in mostly 'ever-green' topics like Academics and Administration, along with continued focus on more modern issues, such as the College'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. Within these messages, we observed a more positive tone relative to the largely negative reactions received in the 2020-2021 academic year. However, not all alumni who took the time to contact the Alumni Council were satisfied overall, as concerns over the general direction of the College and the well-being of students remained high within these communications.

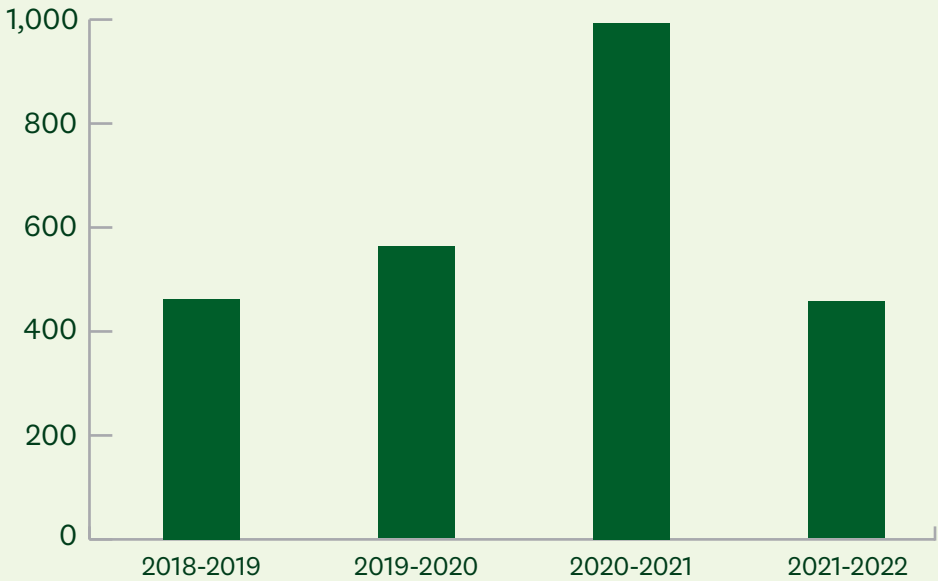
Where relevant, the ALC notes throughout this report the areas where the College could improve its communication and handling of sensitive issues, both to reduce confusion and build stronger connections to alumni. Additionally, we include in this report a summary of a survey sent in Spring of 2022 to alumni volunteer leaders, including all classes, clubs, affiliated groups, the Alumni Council, and the Dartmouth College Fund head agents. This survey was largely the same as one fielded in Spring 2021, thus offering a direct comparison between the two years and a complement to the perspectives gleaned from the ALC emails.

Introduction *continued*

It has been my profound pleasure to work with the members of the ALC this past year, including Alumni Council President Laurie Shapiro '95 and President-elect Chitra Narasimhan '92. 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, Mariah Farbotko GR'18, Amberlee Barbagallo, and Joe Piedrafite. Lastly, my appreciation to the Dartmouth Administration and Board of Trustees for their thoughtful engagement with the ALC, including Senior Vice President for Advancement Bob Lasher '88, Board Chair Liz Lempres '83 Th'84, and Board Advancement Committee Chair Ellie Loughlin '89.

For Dartmouth,
Rachel Bogardus Drew '98
Chair, Alumni Liaison Committee 2021-2022

Messages Recieved Over Time



Alumni Liaison Committee Membership



Rachel Bogardus Drew '98
Chair



**Missy Asbill
Attridge '77**



**Belinda
Chiu '98**



**Latia
Curry '98**



**Whitney
Flynn '07 TU'16**



Munir Haddad '93



**Julie Park
Hubble '87**



**Chitra
Narasimhan '92**



**Kalina
Newmark '11**



**Laurie
Shapiro '95**



Soyeun Yang '16

Correspondence Themes and Topics



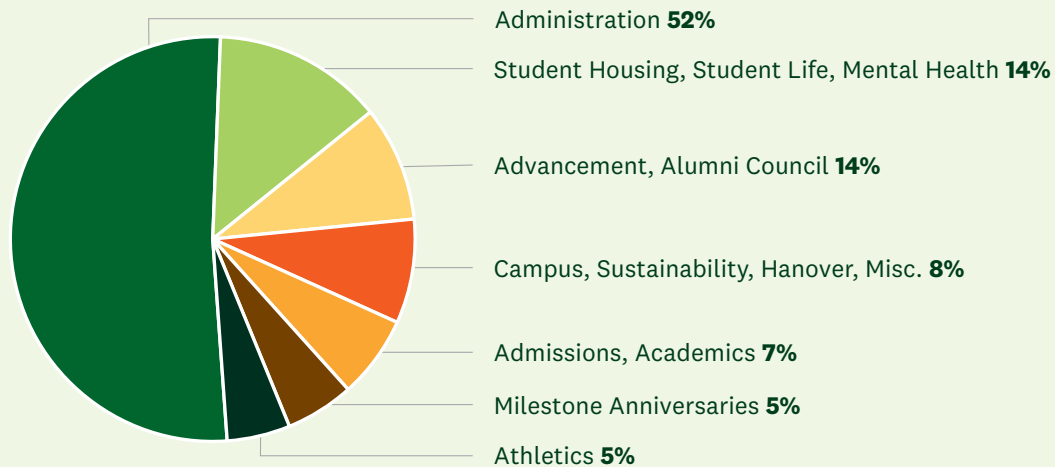
Administration

The correspondence categorized as “Administration” is the largest category of alumni communication with more than 50% of total responses. There were twenty-five (25) subcategories with Administration covering a wide variety of topics ranging from accessibility to the weathervane. Below are a few themes from the 256 items classified as Administration correspondence.

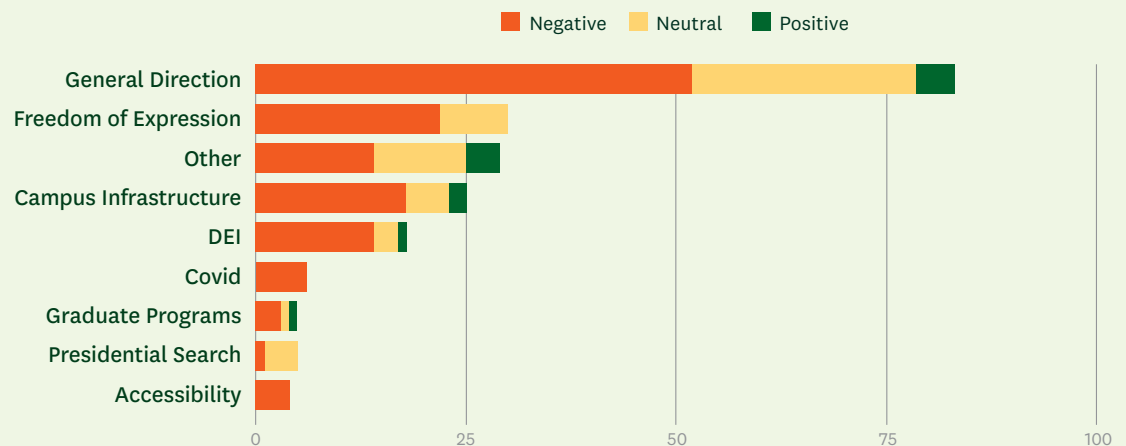
“General Direction” is the largest subcategory. Of the 93 items of correspondence subcategorized as “General Direction,” 7 were positive, 21 were neutral and 65, nearly 70%, were negative. Where class year was provided, 40% of comments were submitted by classes in the 1960s, and nearly all of the sentiment from classes in this decade was negative.

Common themes that emerged were anger over the removal of the weathervane, disappointment in the lack of leadership regarding the cutting of sports teams, COVID policies governed by fear, and more than normal criticism of The President’s Office (both volume and tone). There were positive comments

Distribution of Messages by Primary Topic



Comments within Administration category: Negative, Neutral and Positive



about the improvements led by Interim Dean of Students Scott Brown and a desire to see him in a permanent role. Also frequently mentioned was the conflict between “university” and “college”, which seemed to be a reaction after the Chair of the Board of Trustees used the word “university” in the announcement of the Presidential Search committee on January 27, 2022.

“Freedom of Expression” was the second largest category. Most of the comments received were negative and from older alumni (early ’50s to ’70s) reflecting on reduced conservative viewpoints on college campuses. However, a few commenters did have a more moderate approach.

“... As a liberal arts college Dartmouth has a commendable record of openness to unfamiliar ideas, fair consideration of them, and civil discourse when parties may disagree. In many ways this kind of culture is a keeper of the peace and a guarantor of progress. ...” — Class of 1964

Several citations also noted the increase in the cost of college tuition versus the rate of inflation (and the rate of staff and professor salaries) and commented on access to the campus in terms of economic achievability.

“Campus Infrastructure” comments question the value of expenditures on physical campus infrastructure, with alumni asking why we continue to “build, build, build” when new buildings reduce open spaces and increase the distance for students from the center of campus. Other comments in this category noted concerns over more traffic through campus, diminished rural areas, negative relationships with the town of Hanover and Upper Valley residents, and a possible general decline in the quality of student life. Several comments within “Campus Infrastructure” also focused on the building designs for the Hopkins Center renovation. A few alumni praised the new plans while others expressed concern about the impact on the original Wallace Harrison design.

GOING FORWARD

The College’s broader strategic plan and objectives may be unclear to many of the alumni who write in. That lack of focus is then exacerbated by individual groups throughout the college and alumni body who do not know how to align their goals with the broader mission.

“As I see it, the most important job of the Alumni Council and the Trustees is to set the broad objectives for the institution, not to rubber-stamp whatever the current administration decides. In the meantime, Dartmouth wanders without clear objectives.” — Class of 1958

A well-defined, succinctly communicated series of objectives can help all stakeholders (Students, Parents, Faculty, Alumni, Dartmouth employees, and Partners) reinforce the College’s message and accelerate its’ objectives. Focusing on increased communications and investing more in public relations would help to broadcast these objectives with the College’s varied audiences.

“... Dartmouth has consistently underinvested [in] public relations. We get hammered regularly in the Boston media, often because we simply do not handle the PR proactively or well. I know it is hard for an academic institution to “dirty its hands” by engaging in PR but I believe it is a very important part of building/protecting our brand. ...” — Class of 1969



Student Life

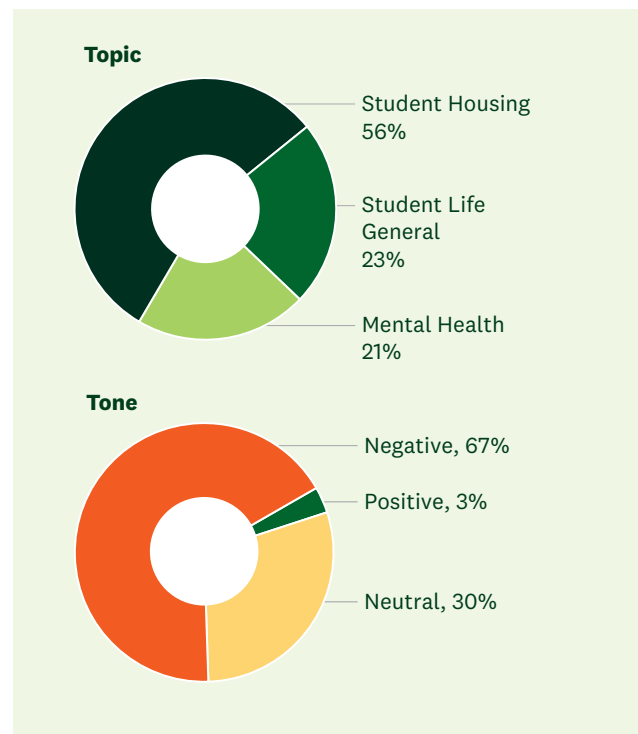
The 61 unique messages received regarding Student Life focused on: Student Housing (56%), General Student Life (23%), and Mental Health (21%), with over two-thirds (67%) negative in tone.

Summer 2021 comments mostly related to in-person classes, while Fall 2021 messages focused on mental health. The announcement of new dormitories led to an influx of messages, with 85% of them being negative. The classes of the 60s, 70s, and 80s shared the most frequently.

THREE MAJOR THEMES EMERGED:

1. The need for infrastructure investment to address the lack of student housing and dining options.

“If Dartmouth does not make a serious investment in undergrad housing (renovate and build) to ensure access to quality, close-in housing for all 4 years, and better dining options, it will fall behind competitor schools... This is a source of constant communication among current undergrads and their parents, whether people want to hear it or not.” — Class of 1988



2. The Lyme Road project's negative impact on the residential undergraduate experience.

While few question the need for dorms, major concerns include isolation for undergraduates, the inconvenience in getting to/from classes, dining & social activities, and environmental concerns. Some questioned prioritizing capital investments to the HOP rather than a more viable undergraduate dorm location. These concerns linked to a broader discussion of Dartmouth's shift towards becoming a large university and its impact on the undergraduate experience.

"I am very disappointed that neither the contemplated action on Lyme Road nor the underlying strategic plan really addresses the fundamental question of what kind of institution Dartmouth should aspire to be." — Class of 1968

3. An urgency for Dartmouth to address mental health and suicide prevention more proactively through more mental health resources.

"The national spotlight will be on us, and I hope we can take that as a kick in the butt to become a model of what can be done to help students with depression and anxiety." — Class of 1985

GOING FORWARD

Transparent and proactive communication is needed regarding the overall renovation plan for dorm housing, the Lyme Road project, and student services infrastructure vis-à-vis the undergraduate experience. Continue the conversation on what and how resources are deployed to address student mental health.

Advancement / Alumni Council

Alumni continue to be very engaged with the College through two of the main forums for alumni interaction – Advancement and Alumni Council. Forty-two total comments were received in this category, which represents a decrease from last year. Where class year was provided, responses skewed toward alumni from older class decades ('50s to '80s).

Reunions and whether they would happen in person or virtually (and there were comments supporting both) was the hottest topic, but other topics ran the gamut from questions about DCF funding, the capital campaign, and mental health concerns on campus. While there were many notes of appreciation to Alumni Councilors, there were also concerns about the interaction between Alumni Relations and alumni, particularly a perceived shift from a historically "high touch" Alumni Relations structure to a more "efficient" one:

"With all due respect to the College, the level of alumni engagement at Dartmouth is not normal - it's pretty remarkable - and I'd hate to see waning engagement or enthusiasm from this move. I would echo [the feedback I received from a constituent], and as we come out of the COVID pandemic, urge that a more personal connection be rebuilt for AR activities." — Class of 1990

GOING FORWARD

Continue to articulate how Alumni Council represents alumni in all areas of engagement, including classes, regions, clubs, and affiliated groups, among others.

Milestone Anniversaries

In response to the prompt “what do the 50th anniversaries mean to you?” the ALC received 25 alumni responses with a variety of stories, suggestions, and sentiments. The majority of comments applauded the College’s decision to admit women, with plenty reminiscing about the experience of adding female classmates in the ‘70s. Several spoke about the importance of the Native American program specifically, highlighting its historical significance and supportive power today for native students. Many of the respondents are looking forward to anniversary programming, in particular stories of our many esteemed female, native, and black graduates. Three responses criticized the College’s focus on these differences as “anti-liberal arts” and exploitive to access funding.

“Lately I hear a LOT of griping about all that is wrong with the USA (and Dartmouth); but, meanwhile, I don’t think there is enough recognition of just how far we have come. I also think it’s hard to ‘see clearly’ what else might need to be done, without first seeing where we were 50 years ago, where we are now, and THEN perhaps we can have an intelligent discussion about what else might need to be done.” — Anonymous

“The three 50th anniversaries are distinguishing milestones for Dartmouth. Thinking about them adds to my sense of connection to the College.” — Class of 1974

Athletics

We continue to see engagement from alumni on the topic of Athletics – with 23 responses last academic year. Of these responses, three key areas emerged including the elimination and re-instatement of the five sports teams, the decline of athletic/program performance, and the hiring for a new Athletic Director before a new President was announced. Overwhelmingly, alumni sentiments were negative.

“The elimination and then reinstatement of 5 sports over the last year...require a thoughtful and complete explanation.” — Class of 1966

“...the decline of Dartmouth Athletics over the past decade has been stunning and significant. Our once proud women’s program, dominant within the Ivies in basketball, ice hockey and lacrosse [are] in shambles. Even Dartmouth programs that have had fairly recent success, such as men’s baseball and soccer and women’s lacrosse currently stand at or near the bottom of the league.” — Class of 1977

GOING FORWARD

Provide ample opportunities to engage the new Athletics Director with the alumni community.



Sustainability

Alumni were also concerned about Dartmouth's role in climate and sustainability. Twenty respondents communicated their disappointment in the College's continued investment in the fossil fuel industry, particularly given Harvard and several peer institutions' recent commitments to divest.

Respondents perceive Dartmouth's refusal to divest as a de-prioritization of sustainability on campus. Many are concerned that this decision will detract from its educational mission, moral core, and ability to attract students. Others drew a parallel to President Kemeny's decision regarding co-education – at the time, controversial, but now widely considered an example of leadership that bettered the College.

Beyond divestment, several respondents suggested incorporating actionable sustainability goals within Dartmouth's broader operating model – particularly across the operating budget, curriculum and foreign study programs, and the Organic Farm.

“As a dedicated alumnus, I am always concerned about Dartmouth taking the global lead whenever possible. In your own passionate appeal in the Call to Lead, you claim educational and moral leadership, but ignore the College's moral duty to lead as well on the issue of fossil fuel investment... Acting locally is not enough for an institution of Dartmouth's prestige, past history, and financial resources on such a critical issue.” – Class of 1970

“My pitch to you is that the Alumni Council have a discussion about the strong impression among certain alumni, and perhaps externally as well, that far from leading around climate change, the College leadership is at great risk of looking more and more like a part of the problem. With climate change being among, if not the single most important issue on the minds of many alumni, plus many 18 year-olds thinking about what college to attend, this strikes me as an incredibly timely and important discussion.” – Class of 1983

GOING FORWARD

Create opportunities for Rosi Kerr, Director of Sustainability, to get in front of alumni and share progress the College has made, and continues to make, on the issue of sustainability.

Admissions

Of the 17 Admissions-related comments, preferential treatment of legacy applicants was addressed by five alumni. Three believe Dartmouth should end the practice.

“I hope the alumni council will consider following Johns Hopkins’ lead and [abolish] legacy admissions. As we try to dismantle white supremacist structures and institutions to make our society more equitable, this would be a great way for Dartmouth to put its money where its mouth is.”

— Class of 1981

By contrast, two commenters argued that Dartmouth would lose something special if we eliminate legacy consideration.

“[D]iscontinuing legacy consideration. . . would certainly curtail alumni donations (at least mine) but more importantly undermine the efforts alumni have made to maintain the cherished legacy of such a small and special school. . . [As a POC woman], it is important for the administration to hear that even we feel that equity and diversity can co-exist with tradition and community.”

— Class of 2001

The final topic with significant interest was interviewing. A few alumni long for the return of an in-person option. Others feel their areas are overwhelmed by the sheer number of applicants and advocate for a process by which Early Decision applicants and a portion of regular decision applicants could be prioritized.

“[P]lease ask [the admissions office] to try to label the priority students by mid-January so I could then wait to assign [interviewers] to these students. . . I just do not think I will ever be able to provide interviews to all the applicants in my region and this adjustment would ensure that the most promising students receive an interview and are left with a positive impression of Dartmouth.”

— Class of 1981

Academics

There were a total of 13 communications addressing academics this year, down dramatically from 226 during the 20-21 school year. Seven were variations of form letters or pleas for the Alumni Council to encourage the establishment of a formal Asian American Studies concentration or minor.

“Seriously, how can Dartmouth not have [a formal Asian American Studies (AAS) program] when Asians are the largest minority group on campus, consistently 15% of the student body?”

— Anonymous

Others encouraged the evolution of the Consortium on Race, Migration and Sexuality to become a formal center.

Finally, there was concern that some faculty of color take on extra work to be available to students, address distressing national events, or organize calls for social justice, that is not fairly considered in their evaluations.

Campus and Hanover

Eleven alumni wrote in about Dartmouth's emphasis on tradition, particularly as it relates to the College's architecture as well as its role in the broader Upper Valley community. Five alumni expressed their shock at the elevated plazas surrounding Dartmouth and Thornton Halls and called for a more historically appropriate, aesthetically conscious design that can still adhere to ADA requirements.

Other alumni expressed their desire to better understand Dartmouth's continued expansion and construction, particularly as it relates to fiscal discipline. Priorities for respondents include the protection of green space, reinstatement of the golf course, progress on the Ledyard Clubhouse project, and maintenance of a positive relationship with the Town of Hanover and its businesses. All respondents conveyed their hope for improved collaboration and transparency from the administration on these dimensions.

“The simplicity, nobility and harmony of Dartmouth Row has graced my consciousness since 1946. Different architectural groupings and styles have different aesthetics, but we as their inheritors owe their builders some obligation of care and respect. The short sightedness of the proposal appalls me, for Dartmouth Row, as we have always known it, is the college’s trademark. You could not pick a more beloved symbol of the college to violate, and your action will offend a huge portion of the college’s alumni.” — Class of 1966

“The College must support local businesses, particularly downtown Hanover [businesses]. Students contemplating applying, attending and finishing their four years want a vibrant downtown offering social, retail, dining and entertainment options that the College cannot provide. This means that the College must not cannibalize local coffee shops, art stores, restaurants, entertainment and retail in order to slightly boost College revenues.” — Class of 1972

GOING FORWARD

A more clearly defined articulation and communication of the campus plan would benefit the alumni body.

Appendices

Alumni Liaison Committee Snapshot Report: March 2022 Pulse Check

The ALC received 200 responses (a 41% response rate) to its March 2022 survey of Alumni volunteer leaders.

In March of 2022, the Alumni Liaison Committee reached out to presidents and vice-presidents of classes, clubs, Women of Dartmouth, and affiliated and shared interest groups – as well as members of the Alumni Council and class head agents – with a brief survey designed to gather information about the topics of interest, questions, comments, and concerns on the minds of the alumni body from the perspective of alumni leaders. The survey was designed to assess the volume and tenor of alumni sentiment and leverage the perspectives of alumni leaders as “hubs,” given their wide networks. Leaders were asked to provide answers based on what they have been hearing from their membership and networks. The survey questions closely mirrored those from the March 2021 survey sent to the same group of alumni leaders (with the exception of class head agents, who were a 2022 addition) to provide College leadership with a longitudinal perspective on issues of importance to these groups. The sentiment reported in the 2022 survey was more positive relative to the year prior (when two-thirds of respondents said it was more negative than usual). There were also fewer “big topics” driving sentiment, as seen in the relatively steady distribution of messages across the top categories (COVID, the presidential transition, and athletics).

Survey Sentiment by Topic and Decade

