

Alumni Liaison Committee Report: Spring 2025 Pulse Check

Executive Summary

The Alumni Liaison Committee has completed its bi-annual “Pulse Check” survey, which was sent to a select group of volunteers comprised of presidents and vice-presidents of classes, clubs, Women of Dartmouth and affiliated and shared interest groups, members of Alumni Council, and class head agents. This **Spring Pulse Check** was distributed to 600 alumni leaders and was open between March 14 and April 6, 2025. We received 113 responses overall, a 19% response rate. This response rate was consistent with previous Spring Pulse Check rates.

In this reporting period we saw a continuing polarization of alumni sentiment. President Beilock is no longer a new leader; as such, alumni are assessing her administration more critically. While many praised her leadership, communication, and vision, they remained split over her handling of the May 1, 2024, protests and the College’s stance on institutional neutrality. The hiring of Matt Raymer as General Counsel received by far the most criticism, yet alumni are split on whether Dartmouth’s political posture is prudent or a retreat from moral responsibility.

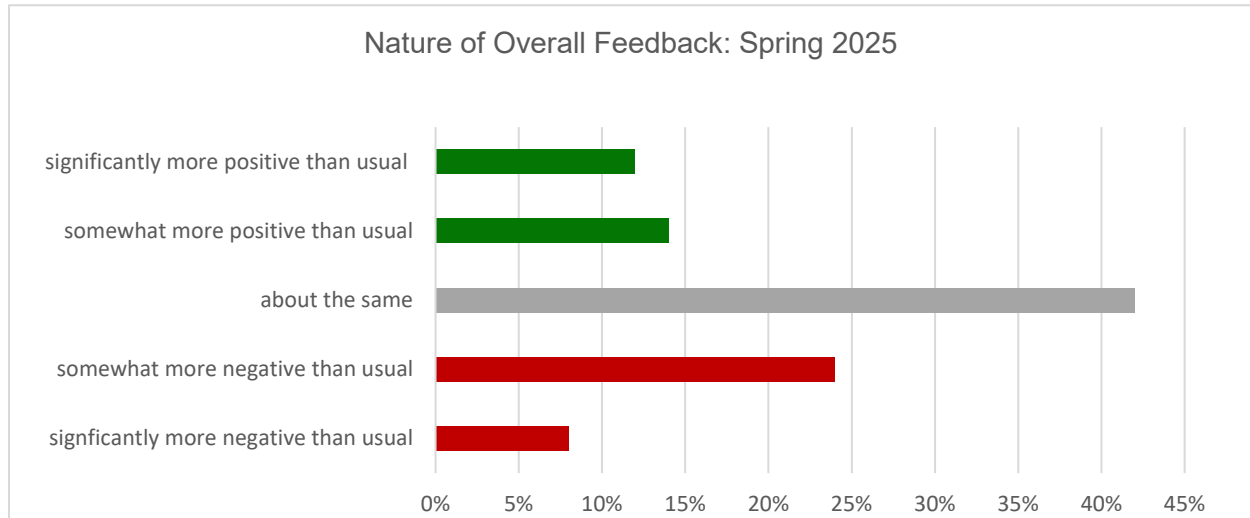
In this environment, we recommend frequent and authentic communication with alumni, not just on the decisions being made but on the values behind them. Furthermore, because Dartmouth does not currently face the same governmental pressures as Harvard or Columbia, President Beilock can renew focus on campus initiatives that are within Dartmouth’s control.

Much has evolved in the world since the information herein was collected, but alumni remain engaged and expect clear, values-driven leadership as Dartmouth navigates complex institutional and political terrain.

Overall Sentiment

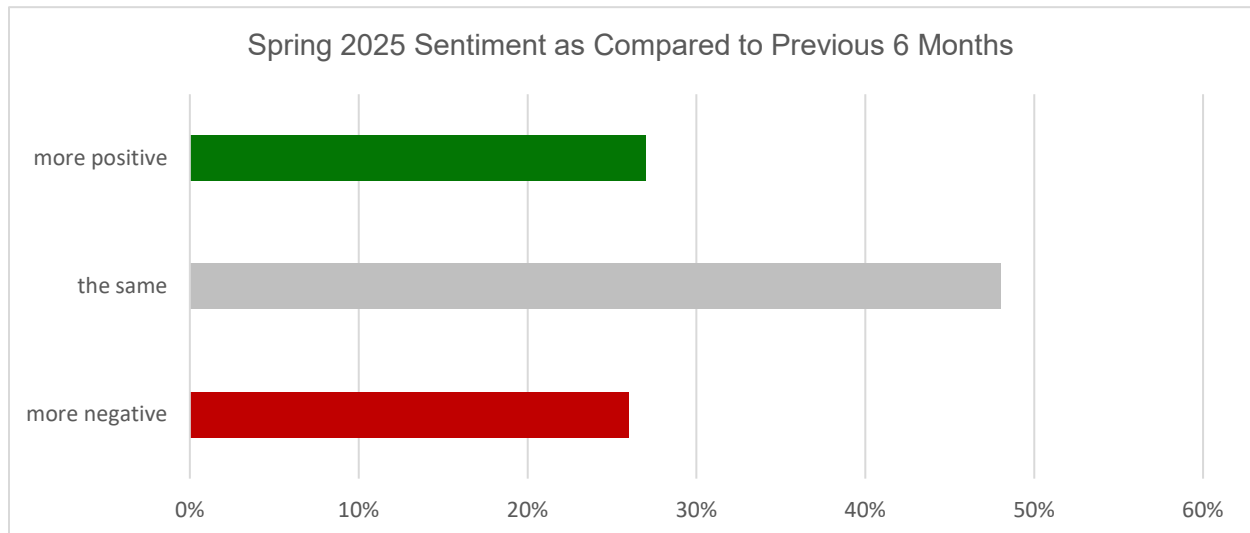
Approximately **89% of respondents had heard some feedback**, down from 94% in the Spring 2024 survey. When asked about the nature of the feedback received, **we see a notable flattening of sentiment, with 42% stating the feedback is about the same** as the (more positive) results of earlier surveys. Those who said the feedback was significantly or somewhat more **positive than usual was 32%** (vs 42% in 2024 and 69% in 2023) while those reporting somewhat or significantly more **negative was 26%** (vs 35% in 2024 and 9% in 2023).

What is the nature of the feedback you are hearing in the last 6 months?

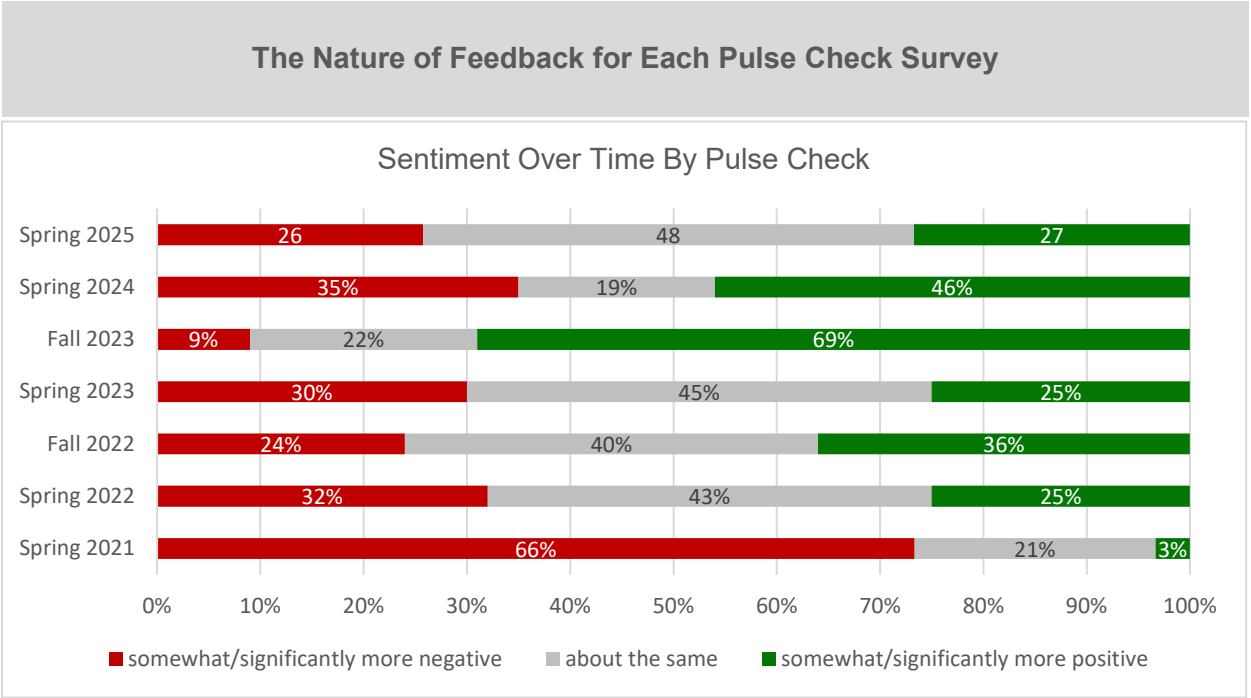


When respondents were asked to consider the feedback they had received in the Spring of 2025 compared to the previous 6 months, a similar **strong plurality reported that the feedback was more of the same.**

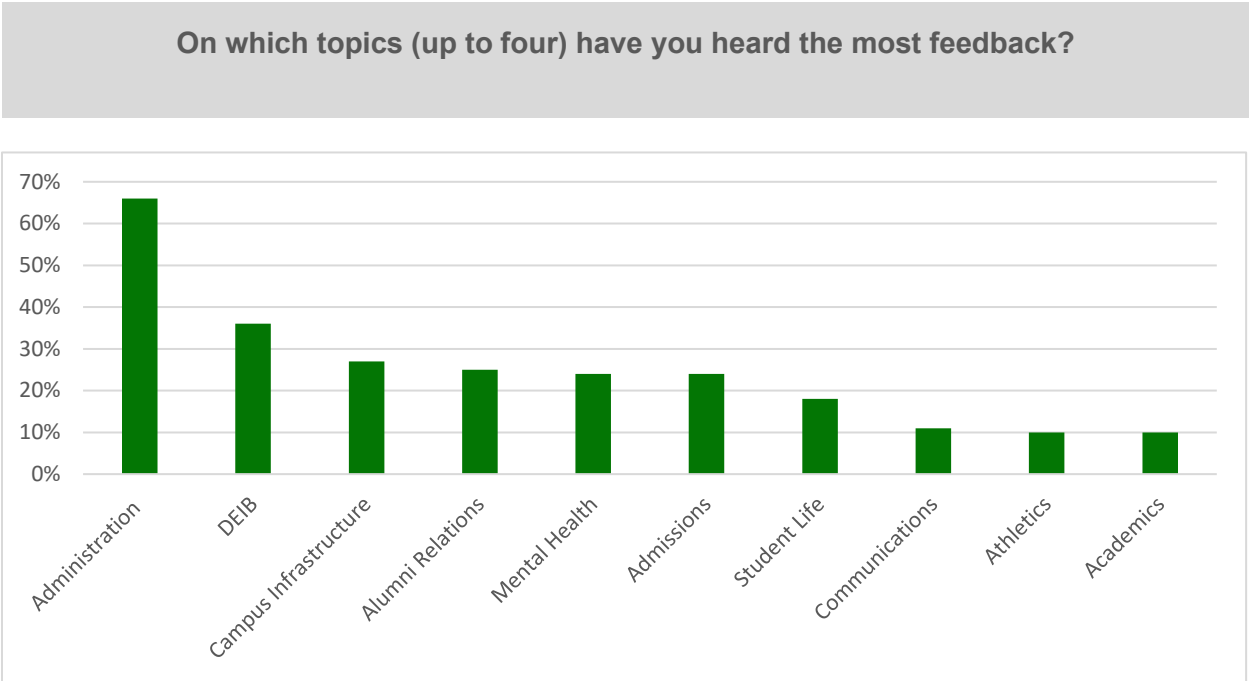
Compared to the previous 6 months, do you think the feedback is more positive/more negative/the same?



Overall, after significant positive sentiment in the Fall of 2023, coinciding with the arrival of President Sian Beilock and her new administration, **we are seeing a reversion to “business as usual” sentiment**, similar to what was seen in 2022 after the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic were receding and before the announcement of President Beilock as successor to President Hanlon.



The topic with the greatest amount of feedback remained Administration, but its share declined by 12%. The other topics with the greatest shift included “Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging” which climbed 14% to the second position, while Athletics declined 15% to one of the least discussed topics.



Key Themes

1. Deep Division Over the Hiring of Matt Raymer as General Counsel

The appointment of Matt Raymer sparked the most intense and polarized feedback. The overwhelming sentiment was negative, with many alumni viewing his background and public stance on birthright citizenship as threatening to Dartmouth's values, international students, and DEI principles.

“Hiring of Matt Raymer as General Counsel and concerns about how/what he will do to protect student rights especially already vulnerable and marginalized populations, given his previous stance on issues such as birthright citizenship.”

Some, however, see the hire as strategic for navigating a hostile federal environment.

“The Raymer hire may well prove to be an excellent choice... Pres. Beilock, Admissions and the BoT should find ways to make it clear he’s an asset, committed to Dartmouth and its mission.”

2. President Beilock’s Leadership

In this survey, President Beilock is on the balance praised for decisive leadership, and many alumni commend her overall articulation, communication, and vision. Some alums believe the *“...profound discomfort and frustration stemming from the [May 1] demonstrations at Dartmouth and other schools has faded to the background,”* and there were several comments expressing support for her initiatives.

“President Beilock is a breath of fresh air... she balances her decisions with respect to various constituents well.”

“Dartmouth’s position on Safe Places [Brave Spaces], seeming to be more ‘open’ than other college for discussion on controversial issues.”

A handful of alumni continued to criticize the handling of the May 1, 2024 protests, and, in combination with the decision to hire Matt Raymer, express a perceived erosion of trust and fear a chilling effect on free speech.

“I cannot in good faith recommend Dartmouth to prospective applicants... It is no longer a safe space for open inquiry or freedom of speech.”

3. Polarization Around Institutional Neutrality and Political Advocacy

Dartmouth’s stance of institutional neutrality – especially in our moment of national political turmoil – elicited mixed reactions, with sentiment seemingly just starting to crescendo during the time period of this survey. Some see it as prudent; others feel it is moral cowardice, especially as peer institutions take more vocal positions.

“Dartmouth is choosing to stand by and watch as the world is being torn apart and not say a word.”

“I generally believe we’ve been doing an excellent job of flying under the radar of the insanity from DC, and I hope we can keep it up.”

“There is satisfaction with President Beilock’s leadership and approach to the significant changes happening that impact private higher education institutions.”

4. Strong Interest in Dartmouth’s National Position and External Threats

Alumni are closely watching how Dartmouth navigates federal policy changes, including threats to research funding, DEI, and student protections. The community is anxious about how the national political climate may impact the College’s autonomy and reputation.

“Potential for unwarranted intrusion into the privileges and rights of the College as an academic institution.”

“Outside changes from the new President’s administration has made us surround the wagons.”

“Trump’s actions have almost everybody on edge and is at the heart of discontent on both sides.”

5. Alumni Engagement: Praise for Communication, Concerns Over Access and Events

Many alumni noted improved communication efforts and appreciated being asked for input.

“That event [Fall 2024 Alumni Council session] left me feeling like the college really cares about what we, as alums, think.”

However, others continue to express concern about fewer in-person alumni events, lack of transparency, and feeling disconnected from decision-making.

“Please work to ensure that class officers meetings return to in person... they make a significant difference.”

6. Dartmouth Athletics – Pride in our Progress

Overall, alumni express pride in Dartmouth’s athletic successes and increased school spirit, with several citing improved team performance and attendance.

“...the sports teams have been doing well which is a barometer for many alums.”

“Varsity sports is seeing a rebound which is refreshing and lends to a sense of pride among alumni and on campus I think. Ivy titles in women’s golf, football, M[en’s] hockey and great improvements in M[en’s] basketball and M[en’s] lacrosse to name some.”

However, a concern was raised about an overemphasis on marquee sports at the expense of traditionally strong programs, coach morale, and resource allocation.

“A fair amount of concern that athletics is becoming focused on a few key sports - such as football, basketball, and hockey - at the expense of traditionally excellent sports at Dartmouth such as skiing...The monies spent on ESPN-like touches—screens and lights in Leede, promotions such as the Red Sox minor league team mascot...seem to be at the expense of rewarding long-time successful Dartmouth coaches with pay raises and recognition.”

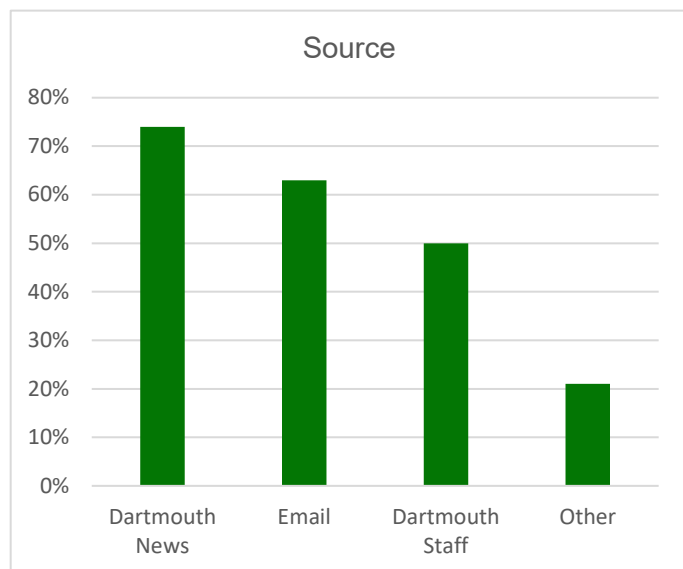
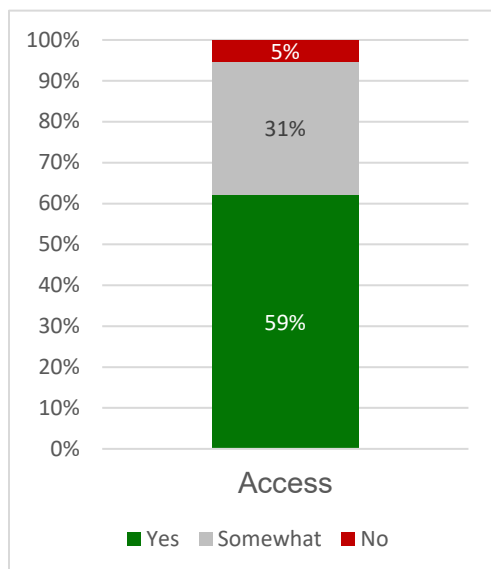
While some feedback does not rise to the level of statistical significance, we believe the feedback is worth noting:

- A few alumni mentioned the new West Wheelock housing expansion and faculty housing being built and were overall positive.
- There were two comments about continued confusion for the school of Arts & Sciences name; one alum said it well, *“I have been trying to inform my classmates about the nature of the administrative change versus a name change for the college, but the message isn’t getting through.”*
- A few volunteers cited brewing issues around dining services degradation, student labor disputes, and continued food insecurity for students.

While alumni volunteers believe information is generally accessible, the share that finds information accessible has declined.

Volunteers generally felt that they were getting the relevant information about the College for their constituents, with 90% affirming access. Dartmouth News and email announcements are the main sources of information. Of note there was a marked increase in the respondents who cited Dartmouth Staff as a source, a positive indication for Dartmouth communication efforts.

Have you had access to information from Dartmouth about the topic areas of the feedback? If so, from which sources?



Recommendations

As the ALC wrote last Spring, President Beilock's honeymoon period is over, and alumni sentiment continues to cool from the high positive from the Fall of 2023. The increase in neutral responses, both in sentiment and access to Dartmouth information, shows an opportunity for more effective communication to the Alumni body.

Going forward, the Administration should:

1. **Offer greater transparency into the values and strategies underlying President Beilock's decisions**, especially as they relate to the current administration in DC and student protests.
 - Absent this insight, some alumni assume the worst: for example, that policies such as "institutional neutrality" are causing Dartmouth to abandon its values for the sake of political expediency with the White House. Some words that disaffected alumni have used to describe the College administration lately are "untrustworthy" and "opportunistic." Transparent, empathetic, and above all **authentic communication can help build alumni trust** that the Dartmouth administration is acting in keeping with the College's mission.
 - **Ensure Matt Raymer is viewed as an asset to the College, everyone in our community, and our mission.** Overwhelmingly negative sentiment around the hiring of Dartmouth's new General Counsel largely boils down to distrust and the perception that it signals a shift away from Dartmouth's long values around being a "basecamp to the world" and a welcoming place to international students.
 - For politically charged issues such as student protests or calls for divestment, more **broadly communicate the College's policies and use specific scenarios and examples to illustrate** these policies in practice to help alums understand better how processes and guidelines will be applied.
 - **Strongly communicate the return of COW and CAGOW events to Hanover and look to create more/other in-person alumni event opportunities.** Alumni were very excited to hear the recommendations from the VOX Working Group and the return of in-person meetings in Hanover. Switching as many virtual programs back to on-campus as possible or creating dialogue sessions for alumni could offer greater opportunities to candidly communicate with alumni and build trust.
 - If there is a benefit to being circumspect about decision making, then consider providing alumni with assurances where lines will not be crossed. **"Fencing in" expectations – i.e., clearly articulating the values the College will uphold and the actions of others that will not be tolerated – can also prevent catastrophizing expectations in our community.**
2. **Focus on wins within Dartmouth's control.**
 - **Alumni are still concerned with the quality of the student experience** including facilities improvement, housing options, food security, athletic accomplishment, and financial accessibility. Focusing positively on these "table stakes," as opposed to

reacting to external challenges such as public sector risk, would allow President Beilock to deliver against her five strategic pillars which were seen by alumni as positive, worthy goals for Dartmouth.

- **Continue to formalize, offer, and share viewpoint-diverse “brave spaces” such as Dartmouth Dialogues.** This allows Dartmouth to model its values to internal and external actors.
- **Dartmouth should continue to engage campus activists in dialogue and processes that are widely seen as responsive and fair.** In this way, even if their preferred policy outcomes are not achieved, students will feel “seen” and may not resort to disruptions that go beyond the bounds of established policies.

Conclusion

It has been challenging to summarize the results of this Pulse Check without addressing the “elephant in the room”: this survey’s timing and close right before the AAC&U open letter controversy, the Alumni Council session, and the all-alumni Town Hall, all of which occurred from mid-April through mid-May. Although the themes of this Pulse Check are strong, relevant ones, the number of overall comments were moderate compared to last Spring’s Pulse Check and certainly compared to the number of open-ended responses the ALC received beginning in mid-April of this year.

We have a responsibility to our alumni volunteer leaders who took the time to contribute to this Pulse Check survey to share the sentiment they had heard, and we have a responsibility to chronicle alumni sentiment at prescribed moments in time for all who would like to understand it.

Nevertheless, we do recognize that the sentiment summarized here may already be obsolete – some new themes have emerged, and some themes have deepened in their intensity, clarity, or even the leaning of their sentiment. We are nearing the end of the College’s fiscal fourth quarter and will attempt to prepare with alacrity that quarterly summary, which covers all alumni sentiment received during the last tumultuous six weeks of Q4 2025.

Appendix: Survey Design and Background

Since March of 2021, the Alumni Liaison Committee has run “pulse check” surveys approximately twice a year to survey alumni sentiment through its most engaged volunteers: leaders of class and club organizations, representatives from Women of Dartmouth, leaders of affiliated and shared interest groups, head agents, and 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.

These pulse checks allow the Alumni Liaison Committee to develop a longitudinal view of alumni sentiment outside of the annual report and elevate emerging issues to the Board and College leadership in real time.

Pulse check surveys have asked the same questions for each of the following timeframes: April/Spring 2022, November/Fall 2022, May/Spring 2023, December/Fall 2023, and June/Spring 2024. Key questions include:

- Have you been hearing feedback about Dartmouth in your alumni organization (classes, clubs, affiliated and shared interest groups) or other networks in the last six months?
- What is the nature of the feedback you are hearing?
- Compared to the previous 6 months, do you think the feedback is more positive/more negative/the same?
- What are the primary reasons for the change in feedback over the past 6 months?
- On which topics (up to four) have you heard the most feedback?
- Have you had access to information from Dartmouth about the topic areas of the feedback? From which sources?

From which alumni organization are you primarily answering these questions?

