

Dartmouth

ALUMNI COUNCIL

Dear '69 Classmates,

The [213th Dartmouth Alumni Council](#) convened in Hanover on October 20-22, 2016, for its annual fall meeting. The overarching theme for this meeting was *Dartmouth for All: Fostering an Inclusive Community*. Below I provide a summary of the high points of the meeting, with a few links to point you to more information along the way. However, before I do, I would like to give a little context to the theme. What do “diversity” and “inclusion” mean at Dartmouth? As you will see in my notes below, a lot depends on one’s perspective. One comment— by Alumni Council President Russell Wolff '89, Tu'94—stuck with me: “Diversity is about who is on the team; inclusion is about who gets to play.” More on this below.

The first general session was about the new [House Communities](#), which became a reality this fall. The discussion was moderated by Mike Wooten, Senior Assistant Dean of Residential Life, and featured two of the House Professors, [Kathryn Lively](#), Professor of Sociology, who is House Professor of South House (Topliff, New Hampshire, and The Lodge), and [Dennis Washburn](#), the Jane and Raphael Bernstein Professor of Asian Studies, who is House Professor of the Living Learning Communities. As Prof. Lively described them, the Housing Communities are meant to provide 1) intellectual engagement, 2) community, and 3) continuity for students, whether or not they are in residence. My sense, in listening to this and previous discussions, is that the third may be the most important added value in converting to the Housing Communities system, because it will provide continuity that has been lacking for students returning to campus after being away per the Dartmouth Plan.

Two important takeaways from the Housing Communities discussion: First, as Prof. Lively pointed out, not all current students are thrilled with the change. Freshmen, who came into this system are the most invested in it, sophomores, who were introduced to the concept during their freshman year, are invested but somewhat less so than the freshmen, and juniors and seniors least. So, it will likely take four years for the Housing Communities to fully take hold. The big test from my perspective will be whether the House Communities actually provide the promised continuity for students returning from an off-campus period under the D-Plan. If they do, it seems to me likely that they will be a success.

The second point addresses the concern that I have heard voiced that the advent of the Housing Communities would lead to the withering of the Greek system. In the discussion, it was pointed out that each of the residential Housing Communities has only about half of the beds needed to fully serve its population (which excludes freshmen, who will continue to live in first year housing, though each will have an affiliation with one or another of the Housing Communities). The Housing Communities are depending on the Greek system, affinity housing, and the like to provide the other half. So, unless there is a massive building program, the Greek system, affinity houses, *etc.*, appear to be here to stay.

The main agenda item in Friday morning’s plenary session was focused on first generation students at Dartmouth. In the context of the theme of the meeting, it was a look into one way that Dartmouth is trying to broaden diversity and inclusion. This topic was introduced by Jay Davis '90, director of the [First Year Student Enrichment Program](#), but the highlight (to me, at least) was Alexis Castillo '19, who spoke of her experiences in that program. It begins with an approximately six-day pre-orientation program between freshman trips and orientation. Much of the effort is centered on peer mentoring, in which juniors and seniors mentor first year students,

though there is also considerable faculty and staff effort, providing 1:1 counseling to students in the program. Alexis recounted that “meeting my first year mentor was like looking in a mirror at my future self.” During the session it was mentioned that a pilot program engaging alumni for career mentoring has been launched, so stay tuned—this may be another opportunity for interested alumni to become engaged with current students.

A panel discussion followed on Diversity of Political Thought in America and at Dartmouth. This was moderated by Jennifer Avellino '89, immediate past president of Alumni Council, and featured faculty members [Andrew Samwick](#), [Sonu Bedi](#), and [Leslie Butler](#). Samwick is the Sandra L. and Arthur L. Irving '72a P'10 Professor of Economics and Director, Nelson A. Rockefeller Center for Public Policy and the Social Sciences. He is also the faculty advisor to the Young Republicans chapter on campus. Bedi is Associate Professor of Government, and Butler is Associate Professor of History. One important point that came across is that students at Dartmouth were not shocked by the presidential debates, either demeanor or content. It was suggested that this was likely because they grew up with reality TV, which regularly portrays the disgusting, debasing, *etc.* For some, it has become the norm to discredit fact-based reality. One of the faculty discussants likened it to writing program with a deep error that nonetheless runs: what results is nonsense.

Among the questions asked by the audience were: Is there an atmosphere of political correctness on campus? Are students able to express their opinions? Prof. Butler responded that she does not see students suppressed. “I don't find that ‘political correctness’ constrains students in my classes.”

But the real goal is broader: promoting, enabling, building civil political discourse. How do faculty members design courses so that students see the possibility of a bipartisan, cooperative future? Faculty members want to support talking across ideologies, but not give their classes the idea that “anything goes”. Students want to know what is the “right way” to think about an issue; faculty need to support students exploring, taking the risk of being wrong. The Internet has reinforced immediate gratification in students, making it challenging to get them to develop ideas, and to reflect on them. Prof. Samwick summed it up by saying that he wants students to have diverse viewpoints—and wants them to work together, prioritizing their ideological viewpoints so that they can find issues on which they can work together.

As an academic scientist, I do not often have to cope with political ideologies in my classrooms; however, we all worry about the balance between free speech and civility. Any institution of higher learning, and particularly an institution like Dartmouth, needs to protect absolutely free speech within civil discourse. It is when things turn uncivil that they get mucky.

Diversity and inclusion of a different sort was the theme of the next session, which was a panel of leaders of various [alumni affinity groups](#). It was moderated by Victoria Gonin, Deputy Director of Alumni Relations and included Martha Gerhan '83, representing Women of Dartmouth; Adrienne “Tee” Lotson '82 of the Black Alumni of Dartmouth Association (BADA); Melanie Pastuck '11 of the Dartmouth Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Alumni/ae Association (DGALA); and Steven Tseng '95, '01Tu of the Dartmouth Asian Pacific American Alumni Association (DAPAAA). The central question addressed by the panel was: what added value do the affinity groups bring to Dartmouth? Steven Tseng offered that affinity groups can help make students who are in a minority feel part of the wider Dartmouth community. He noted that for Asian Pacific students, there was a demographic change for Asian Pacific students who matriculated around the year 2000. Earlier classes had fewer, so the emphasis was on assimilation; later classes had greater numbers and were better able to sustain their cultural heritage. Tee Lotson noted that diversity is marketing; inclusion is execution: planning, programming, *etc.* Melanie Pastuck noted that her group supports students by being out and proudly identifying as being both LGBTQ and part of the broader Dartmouth community.

A highlight of any Alumni Council is a session with President Phil Hanlon '77. For this Council meeting, he was joined by Michael Mastanduno, Dean of the Faculty and Nelson A. Rockefeller Professor of Government. President Hanlon opened with the rhetorical question: Dartmouth is an awesome place, why change anything? He gave what he described as the Red Queen hypothesis: you've got to run like hell just to stay in the same place. Dartmouth has a long history of producing leaders, more than just expert practitioners of their crafts. He also discussed the new House Communities and their role in strengthening the student academic and social experience, experiential learning initiatives, the [Inclusive Excellence](#) initiative, and the creation of the [Arthur L. Irving Institute for Energy and Society](#). Mastanduno focused on Dartmouth's unique niche as a fine liberal arts college with the resources of a research university, not to become a research university, but to support faculty research, which in turn provides opportunities for students. "Every undergraduate should be both a broad and deep thinker."

On Friday we fêted this year's [recipients of Alumni Awards](#) at a gala dinner which featured [video tributes](#) to each candidate. Dartmouth Alumni Award recipients were Philip C. Kron '60, Tu'61, Charles E. Haldeman Jr. '70 and Margaret (Meg) N. Sommerfeld '90, and Young Alumni Distinguished Service Award recipients were Maia Josebachvili '05 and Shounak Simlai '05, Th'07.

Saturday morning featured an update from the Board of Trustees, led by Bill Hellman '80, outgoing Chair of the Board, and Trustee Caroline Kerr '05. One of the questions that Hellman addressed concerned the fiscal connections between the College and the Medical School. He explained that while Geisel is under the purview of the Board, the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center is not and is a fiscally separate entity. Asked about greatest threat to the College, Hellman said "resources." "We are not as good at fundraising as we think that we are." He noted that Princeton has three times the endowment per student as Dartmouth. As he concluded, Hellman was recognized for his leadership and service with a standing ovation from the Council.

There was more, including several updates and reports. I encourage you to consult the detailed [minutes](#) of the meeting for those. But before I close, I encourage you to join your classmates in any of the many activities planned running up to our 50th reunion: a regional mini-reunion, any of the Class Connection activities, the next Homecoming, *etc.* For details about any of these, check out our new [class website](#), brought to you by our longtime webmaster, Peter Elias. Please be in touch.

With best wishes,



Jim Staros '69

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