March 21, 2014

To the Dartmouth community:

Greetings. With our March Board meeting behind us, let me update you on the activities and focus of the Trustees. We are very excited by the direction that President Hanlon has set forth for Dartmouth and are aligned with his ambitions for the institution. With Carolyn Dever joining as Provost in June, the senior team is now fully in place to push forward with this agenda.

The two centerpieces of President Hanlon's academic vision are increasing experiential learning (learning by doing) and driving interdisciplinary teaching and scholarship around a number of the world's most pressing issues.

While experiential learning is hardly new to Dartmouth, both within the undergraduate and graduate school curriculums and through service and extracurricular activities, there will be a renewed focus on this form of learning. Recent examples of new experiential programs and courses include the Neukom Digital Arts Leadership and Innovation Lab (DALI), Charlie Wheelan's public policy course on India, and the Entrepreneurship Center set to open this spring. Health Care Delivery Science has been our most visible effort to tackle important problems with an interdisciplinary approach. Our objective is to launch several more interdisciplinary programs in the years ahead. Stay tuned.

Important changes to undergraduate housing will be taking place over the next two years. The current lottery system for upper-class students and the constant associated moving among dorms do not allow for a sense of community in our residence halls. Although many details have yet to be worked out in consultation with faculty, students, and staff, the new living arrangements will embrace the concept of the "house system." Students will live together not only in their freshman year but also in upper-class residence clusters for their three remaining years. Investments in academic programming and affiliated faculty are planned to foster community in these residential clusters. In addition, several themed residences (Global Village, Entrepreneurship) will be introduced this coming fall for students who seek a greater immersion in those areas. These changes should reintroduce a dorm-based sense of identity for undergraduates.

Despite the initiatives put in place over the past several years, we still have much work to do to create a truly inclusive and welcoming community for all students. The planned housing changes will help, but they are not sufficient. Quite simply, social norms need to change and harmful behaviors need to stop. Sexual assault is completely unacceptable. In addition to the education and community mobilizing efforts around this issue, such as the Dartmouth Bystander Initiative, the Trustees emphatically endorse proposals to change the way cases are investigated and to strengthen sanctions. This change will take us to an external investigator model which we believe will act as a stronger deterrent and increase reporting of incidents. While eliminating harmful behaviors is an absolute must, a community-wide conversation about changes to social norms on our campus also needs to occur and is in the planning stages.
The budget for the 2014-15 academic year saw two major changes: a new process for the reallocation of expenses to fund new initiatives and a better alignment of undergraduate tuition growth with household income growth. Dartmouth's net tuition (net of financial aid) is growing at a lower rate than the "sticker price" increase of 2.9 percent (the lowest increase since 1977), with financial aid dollars budgeted to grow at twice the rate of headline tuition increases. In addition, this year President Hanlon implemented a change in the budgeting process that requires each division, annually, to reallocate a portion of its budget to new initiatives supporting students and faculty.

Further, Dartmouth's endowment is performing well by any measure. It has crossed the $4 billion mark for the first time, permitting a growing contribution to the College's budget while reducing the percentage spending rate from the endowment to below 5 percent. Our endowment spending formula drives the spending rate down when endowment performance is strong and allows the rate to rise when performance is weak, dampening the volatility of spending for budgeting purposes.

The decline in undergraduate applicants this year is prompting a re-examination of everything we do to attract the best applicant pool: the alignment of our programs with current and prospective student interests; our professional development efforts; financial aid policies; communication with applicants, parents, and high schools; and on-campus tours, and information sessions. While the decline in applications was an important wake-up call, it should also be kept in perspective. This year's applicant pool is the highest quality ever (as measured by standardized test scores), and our admit rate will approximate 11 percent.

I'm very pleased that my fellow Trustee Bill Helman will be taking over as Board chair following graduation in June. Your Board will be in very capable hands. Bill and I are already working together with President Hanlon to ensure a smooth transition.

No letter about Dartmouth would be complete without acknowledging a few of the many accomplishments of our students over the past year. Jonathan Pedde '14 and Joseph Singh '14 became the College's 74th and 75th Rhodes Scholars.

Though it takes them away from the College for two years, we are proud that Riley Ennis '15, Gary Le '15, and Christopher Walker '15 are among the 20 recipients of the Thiel Fellowship, which provides funding and support for the pursuit of entrepreneurial, scientific, and technical projects. Distance runner Abbey D'Agostino '14 has won more individual NCAA titles (seven) than any other Ivy League athlete in history--and she still has the outdoor track season ahead. And at the recent Winter Olympics, if Dartmouth were a country, we would have come in 21st in the medal count.

Best wishes for a productive and enjoyable spring season, whenever it finally arrives.

Sincerely,

Steve Mandel '78
Chair, Dartmouth Board of Trustees