

WILLIAMS COLLEGE COUNCIL

REPORT ON MEETING WITH THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

SPRING 2017



Report on Meeting with the Board of Trustees

Friday, April 14th, 2017

On Friday, April 7th, members of College Council had dinner with the Board of Trustees and College President Adam Falk. We were glad to have the opportunity to communicate student concerns to the Board and engage in an open dialogue regarding issues on campus. To foster increased communication and understanding between the Student Body and the Board of Trustees, College Council has compiled a summary of Council members' discussions with Trustees at the event.

As your representatives, it is our goal to accurately communicate the concerns and desires of the Student Body in dialogue with the Board of Trustees. To prepare for the dinner, College Council solicited thoughts and opinions from the Student Body. In an open meeting, we talked with representatives from the Coalition for Transparency and Accountability (CTA). CTA is an organization comprised of students who strive to promote more open and honest dialogue between the Board of Trustees and the Student Body: a goal shared by College Council. Additionally, we surveyed the Student Body to collect perspectives on the issues students believed Trustees should hear. Members of Council reviewed those responses in order to best understand and represent the opinions of our constituents.

An important note as you read:

Several Trustees clarified that their comments reflected personal views rather than the views of the Board at large. The comments below should be read as individuals speaking on their own behalf in informal conversation with Council members, rather than official statements made on behalf of the Board.

We strived to make this report as comprehensive as possible, but the comments detailed below should not be considered to fully represent every comment made by every Trustee. Issue categories with few bullets do not indicate that concerns in the area were not discussed, but rather that Trustees expressed similar sentiments on the topic. Duplicate comments have been consolidated into single bullets to provide a summary that is as clear and concise as possible.

Best,

The College Council Executive Committee:

Web Farabow '18, *Co-President*
Allegra Simon '18, *Co-President*
Michael Rubel '19, *VP of Communications*
Chetan Patel '18, *VP of Academic Affairs*
Morgan Spellman '18, *VP of Community & Diversity*
Ben Gips '19, *VP of Student Affairs*
Maria Heredia '20, *VP of Student Organizations*
Haley Lescinsky '18, *Treasurer*
Spencer Carrillo '20, *Parliamentarian*

Financial Aid

- The Board is discussing international need-blind and summer contribution requirements, but the Trustee was unable to provide statements on either of those specific policies
- A Trustee was surprised to hear no-loan and international need-blind issues were top priorities for students. They explained that they would raise the issues in the Board meeting the following day.
- A Trustee was not particularly familiar with nuances of the no-loan policy, but did explain the Board would be reviewing the policy soon.
- After the policy was brought up by a student, multiple Trustees and President Falk were interested in discussing the summer earnings requirement
- When asked about international need-blind policy, a Trustee stated that the College aimed to balance financial aid between international and domestic students—largely because the majority of international students are on financial aid
- Several Trustees and the President explained the important balance between the various specific financial aid issues (international need-blind, no-loan, etc.) and the decisions necessary to compromise between them
- A Trustee and the President both articulated concerns over stress on middle-income families forced to pay more than they can afford in order to pay tuition costs and who face significant hardship because of income

- A Trustee discussed the recent restructuring of financial aid administration and the hiring of the new Dean for Admission and Financial Aid while expressing optimism about this opportunity for growing student input and involvement
- In terms of summer earnings contribution, a Trustee was interested in expanding opportunities for summer funding for students undertaking different types of unpaid/low-paying internships for those that can't afford such opportunities
- Another Trustee discussed the possibility of decreasing summer earning requirements on a case-by-case basis for students who must use their summer requirements for familial expenses
- The President emphasized that the Board must first prioritize specific end goals for the financial aid program's impacts before we can focus on specific policy implementations-everywhere there is a tradeoff. In particular, his focuses on making Williams more affordable for middle-class families, whether that would be through no more loans or just more aid was unclear. He also discussed "need-seeking" policies and the priority of meeting the full need of every student rather than universally admitting need-blind.
- In response to financial aid questions, a Trustee replied by mentioning how Williams students graduate with less debt than students from peer schools with a no loan policy
- A Trustee discussed the sacrifices that would be necessary if the administration implemented both need-blind international admission and no-loan policies

Psych Services

- A Trustee explained Psych Services comprise a large focus of the Board, but was also concerned over some miscommunications regarding mental health services. The Trustee expressed a belief that some input they hear could be anecdotal evidence or not necessarily correlate to the rest of the community.
- A Trustee explained the Board's concern with increasing need for Psych Services and discussed the efforts that have been made recently in new therapist hiring openings.
- A Trustee was glad to see the College's progress over recent years in addressing the increasing concerns over mental health on campus.

Sexual Assault

- A trustee expressed that this issue is addressed at every meeting
- A trustee believes that college prevention policies are really improved by Williams culture of active bystanders and the presence of JA's. The trustee expressed surprise that there may be issues with the college's response policies to sexual assault because the College started with response policies and they felt they were strong.
- A Trustee cited that their committee works closely with Meg Bossong and sexual assault is a continued conversation at Board meetings, but said that they would be open to hearing more student input on what students believe are inadequate aspects of the response policies of the college.

Fossil Fuel Divestment

- Most Trustees who were asked about divestment were opposed.
- Several Trustees considered the divestment issue to be fully resolved. Some felt this had been relayed to the Student Body.
- A Trustee said that the Board had discussed divesting, met with members of Divest Williams, weighed options, and decided that divesting would have a negligible impact on the environment, but a significant impact on the endowment.
- A Trustee said that divesting would require them to make sacrifices in other places such as financial aid.
- Several Trustees said that they have given strict instructions to the fund managers to seek out more environmentally friendly investments when possible.

Trustee Transparency and Accountability

- A Trustee said that they read every email they receive.
- A Trustee expressed a belief that there may be a fundamental difference in the role of the Trustees as they view themselves and the role that the students would like them to have. The Trustee expressed the Board's efforts to address students and hear their feedback, but politely questioned if all students consistently undertook efforts to meet the Board halfway on issues.
- Several Trustees thought that activists and Board members talk past each other even if they are addressing the same issues, and there is

a need for more effective ways to facilitate cordial conversation.

- A Trustee talked about feeling as though students do not understand how much they care for the college and genuinely want to be making positive change.
- A Trustee believed that the Board has come a long way since the beginning of their tenure in terms of transparency towards the student body. In terms of evidence for this belief, the Trustee referenced longer, publicly accessible bios for all trustees, college council dinners, and last years open reception. The Trustee did mention that last year's reception almost resulted in a trustee decision to abandon outreach attempts.
- A Trustee expressed interest in hearing from the 'silent majority' of the student body.

JA/Entry System

- A Trustee believed that Junior Advisors should not be paid, arguing it would distort the motivation of the position
- A Trustee explained that the Board would be happy to discuss any issue the student body is concerned with. If there is visible agreement on campus that it needs review, students can request for administration to conduct a review of it. The Trustee recommended students should think about whether we want the trustees themselves to tackle the entry system, and if so, what specific problems with it they should review.
- A Trustee discussed the notion of the JA/entry system as a relic of a less inclusive time at Williams and weighed its merits while discussing possible alternative first-year dorm experiences

DACA Student

- A Trustee explained that the issue of supporting DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals)/undocumented students on campus is a high priority for them.

Other Discussion

- A trustee discussed respectful dialogue on campus, and believed that discourse can often become negative. The trustee and student both expressed a sentiment that more respectful dialogue should be a focus of the students on campus. The trustee believed that different or opposing viewpoints should be embraced over attempts by students to belittle certain points of view.
- One trustee talked a lot about what the idea of what Williams community values, and asked that "questioning" be considered for William's Values discussion because they believed that learning how to ask the rights questions is an important aspect of Williams.
- A trustee was specifically concerned with promoting a healthier party culture on campus, and mentioned interest in the new alcohol policy and finding additional ways to promote a safer campus environment. Other trustees mentioned the new alcohol policy as well.
- A trustee expressed interest in how to increase student enjoyment of their time at Williams
- A trustee inquired about the extent of student activism on campus, and whether or not student activists were centralized in certain communities or pursued a wide variety of interests.