

**President James Wright Answers Your Questions
About Dartmouth College
Winter 2005**



The following questions and answers are from speeches given by President Wright in Chicago, Denver, Sarasota, Vero Beach, and Naples. For the full text of the president's speeches at these clubs as well as in Los Angeles and San Francisco see: <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~presoff/speeches/2005>

1. Is there a plan to turn Dartmouth into a university?

No. We are not turning into anything other than Dartmouth—a place well practiced in knowing who it is and what it will be. Dartmouth will remain true to its mission and history. Certainly we have professional schools, and they are a source of pride.

Dartmouth Medical School has a history nearly as long and as rich as that of the College. It has a small MD program today and Ph.D. programs. It excels in student-faculty collaboration. The Thayer School of Engineering is the oldest engineering school in the country and it provides a strong undergraduate liberal arts program in engineering sciences and a small but vigorous interdisciplinary graduate program. The Tuck School of Business is the oldest business school in the world and is consistently among the top ten schools in the world—*The Wall Street Journal* has twice ranked it as the top business school. It is certainly the smallest of the leading business schools. The graduate programs in the arts and sciences are more recent—most of the modern ones were established in the 1960s when President Dickey and the Board sought to strengthen programs in several departments by introducing small and focused graduate study.

Each of these programs is marked by qualities of small scale, a truly collaborative culture, and by very close student-faculty relationships. The graduate students do not teach undergraduate courses but they do work as lab instructors and in other activities. They are a rich part of Dartmouth. They predate all of us and they enrich this College. I have called Dartmouth a “university in all but name”—and it is. But the name is important and it is one we embrace.

2. Has Dartmouth shifted away from its undergraduate focus as it aspires to be something else?

Once again, the answer is no. Follow my speeches and statements—and look at our actions. I have regularly insisted that Dartmouth provides the strongest undergraduate education in the country. This is our legacy and this is our ambition—and this is our niche. Why would we seek to be anyone but Dartmouth College? Let others seek to be like us—and many are seeking this. Dartmouth is a place that derives its strength from a true sense of community where students have a sense of belonging, of friendship, and of tremendous pride in the good fortune of being Dartmouth students. And as I pointed out earlier, our students are extremely pleased with over 90 percent of students satisfied with their experience.

3. Has Dartmouth come to focus on research to the detriment of its strength as a teaching institution?

No. But I should also point out that teaching and research are not mutually exclusive categories. The Dartmouth that I came to in 1969 was a school where I was expected to be a committed and productive scholar and a committed and accomplished teacher. This was the Dartmouth of Charlie Wood and David Roberts, of Dick Stoiber, Colin Campbell

and Fred Berthold, the Dartmouth of John Kemeny. And faculty who are committed to teaching and scholarship continue to be the Dartmouth model.

And it works. Dartmouth students expect faculty who will value the work of the classroom and who will provide them with guidance and mentoring and even friendship. Ninety-six percent of last year's seniors were satisfied with their faculty. I have read the letters of every tenure case for the last 16 years. As part of that process, we compile a packet of letters from former students assessing the faculty member's strength as a teacher and their contributions to the student's growth. We expect excellence in this file—and I can assure you that this generation of faculty are deeply committed to the values and the teaching culture of Dartmouth.

4. Is Dartmouth well managed financially? Are the priorities clearly set?

It will not surprise you if this time I answer “yes”! I think that the student satisfaction data as well as our admissions results suggest that we have our priorities right. Fortunately, I am not alone in this assessment. Let me share with you the conclusion of Standard & Poor's when they completed our recent bond rating. They noted that their AAA rating “issued for Dartmouth College, reflects impressive undergraduate and graduate demand profiles, excellent student quality, historically strong financial results, a large endowment ... and a manageable debt burden.” S&P also wrote, “An impressive management team with conservative budgeting practices has led to historically positive results at Dartmouth.”

Dartmouth today—despite a very straightforward mission—is a complicated organization. It may not be evident to you, and if we do our job well, this is as it should be, but we are subject to many of the legislative, regulatory, judicial, and market factors that affect businesses and other institutions. Much of our budget goes to compensation. The market for the best faculty and the best staff is a competitive one. In the last few years we have seen a real spike in health insurance costs, especially in retiree health benefits. We have a number of union contracts that have recently come up for negotiation. We have seen tremendous growth in the cost of fuel oil, in building materials, in insurance and in computer security—we now have the equivalent of 12 people looking after this important activity, while before 9/11 we had at most two people.

The federal government requires a whole set of controls and reports on supervision of their substantial funds. They also regulate health and safety and require more support and consulting for drugs and alcohol; there are mandates and reports required under Title IX and federal equal opportunity laws. There are federal accommodation laws regarding physical handicaps and we need to provide support for diagnosed learning disorders. The NCAA requires compliance officers for athletic programs.

Even with these extensive additional financial obligations, we continue to focus on our key priorities—providing our students and faculty with the best possible environment in which to learn and work. Standard & Poor's determined that we have done this and they awarded Dartmouth their highest rating.

I have discussed with the Board of Trustees my interest in initiating a major review of the way we organize ourselves administratively and to determine if we meet goals of efficiency and effectiveness in all of our operations. I think we do and I also think we can

always find ways to do this even better. I expect to announce action on this shortly. But we will build on a position of strength.

5. Is the College in the middle of a campaign to eliminate or to significantly curtail the Greek system?

No, not at all. Although there are those who persist in arguing that there is a secret plan to do just that. The Student Life Initiative of 1999 started a process, the purpose of which was to make the campus a more inclusive place, one where everyone is welcome, one that affirmed historical values such as community and continuity. We have not yet succeeded in these purposes—an important task will be to complete the residential, dining, recreational, and social space construction and renovation that is now underway.

In terms of the fraternities and sororities our goal has been to make them more fully a part of the community rather than apart from the community. Because of the responsiveness of student leaders in these organizations as well as the alumni associated with them, this effort has been largely successful. We have completed audits of the physical plants of the houses and the College is offering them low-interest loans to address the code and other issues that have been identified. We also have rechartered the Phi Delta Fraternity, an option we did not have to exercise. We have moved rush back into the fall term in response to requests from the organizations and in recognition of their positive efforts.

The task of relating to these houses is always complicated by the alcohol issue and by the increasing level of controls and changing codes required by the state. We continue to work with students on these matters and of course must meet the requirements of the state and of changing terms of liability.

6. Does Dartmouth have speech codes that curtail free expression on campus?

No we do not. There are no codes. My convocation remarks in September provide a pretty clear and explicit statement of the high value that I place upon free speech. Academic institutions such as Dartmouth depend upon the free exchange of ideas and we cannot tolerate speech codes.

At Convocation, I made clear that freedom to speak does not provide freedom from criticism for that which is spoken—and I urged students to engage more fully in debating and sharing views that are a part of the learning process.

7. Do we have too many large classes?

This particular issue has received a lot of attention recently and there is some misunderstanding floating around. The vast majority of classes at Dartmouth remain small—students take freshman seminars that are capped at 16 students, introductory language courses that are capped at 22, introductory English 2,3, and 5 are set at 20 students. Higher-level seminars are always below 20 students. Even the majority of midlevel courses are small.

It is the case that some of our most popular courses in the most popular majors have waiting lists and some students do not get into the courses they want. If this is not

acceptable, neither is it new. This has always been the case. I remember my courses in American history would often exceed the room limit in Reed Hall and I would need to turn students away. I remember in the 1970s serving as freshman advisor and having lists of courses that students would not be able to enroll in because they were filled as a result of upper-class students having already taken all the spaces. It is the case that many departments have imposed size limits on courses for pedagogical reasons—faculty want to be able to set papers for students and to be able to really get to know the students in their class.

Overall, about 10 percent of the more than 2,000 courses offered each year actually exceed their cap, and of these about half are either freshman seminars, where the students need to pick several choices, and introductory languages or English courses where we add sections as needed. So, in the end, only between 2 and 4 percent of upper level courses close resulting in students having to choose another course. Moreover, most students, because of the priority system in place for capped courses, get into these courses on their second attempt.

There is a problem and we should not minimize it. Dean Carol Folt has reviewed this situation and has added faculty lines and courses where she believes it is necessary. But it is also the case that students are very satisfied with their academic experience and with the accessibility of the Dartmouth faculty. As we add more faculty in the arts and sciences, we will be able to better address this issue.

8. What is the role of intercollegiate athletics at Dartmouth? Why aren't we more successful with our men's teams?

We are far more successful than some people recognize—and not yet as successful as we wish to be. Let us talk about men's teams for a moment—but recognizing that this only gets at half of our programs and of our success. I would argue that there have been few times in Dartmouth's athletic history—perhaps in the late 50s and early 60s—when so many men's teams are doing so well.

I have in my office the Ivy League championship trophy, the Parkhurst Trophy, appropriately, that the men's soccer team won in the fall—for the second time in three years. The men's hockey team was in the ECAC playoffs, winning the first series against Yale and losing a tough round against the University of Vermont, and they have set records with their wins over the last four years. The men's basketball team has had a remarkable turnaround under new Coach Terry Dunn, finishing at .500 in the Ivy League. Dartmouth skier David Choudounsky '08 won the men's slalom in the NCAA championships this past weekend, the fourth year in a row a Dartmouth skier has done this. The ski team finished fifth in the nation in the NCAA finals. Our baseball team is picked to win the Ivy League and our men's lacrosse team won the Ivy championship two years ago, the first time since 1965, and is ranked nationally. Rugby is in the nationals this spring. There surely have been years in the past when each of these storied programs has done as well—or better. There have not been many times when they all have done so well.

In addition, we have other sports where our athletes compete successfully against their peers at other schools. We are committed to being competitive with all our teams. The obvious exception is football, which has been our flagship, the most successful program in the Ivy League, and we are tired of losing. Buddy Teevens is back in town.

Now I won't let you focus only on the men's teams though—women's basketball and hockey continue to be the strongest programs in the history of the Ivy League—women's basketball has won 14 of the last 25 Ivy titles and defeated Harvard to go to the NCAA tournament. Hockey is a national power, participating in three of the first four NCAA final four rounds, as is lacrosse, which is ranked in the top ten nationally. And our women's soccer program is year after year excellent, winning three of the last six Ivy titles. Women tennis players, squash players, skiers, and swimmers excel.

We need to strengthen our program overall so that it can compete effectively against our peers. We do this academically, and I expect to do it in athletics. The Ivy League model is the right model for intercollegiate athletics. I have served on the NCAA Division 1 Board of Directors as well as on the NCAA Reform Task Force, and I am very much aware of the abuses and the low graduation rates of some programs. But these are not issues in the Ivy League.

We need not only a model program, but also a successful program (success should be part of being a model). And success comes down to three things: people, student-athletics, and resources.

- ❖ We have the right people—coaches who focus on being teachers and on winning—and not making excuses.
- ❖ We have great student athletes. They are great students both on and off the court. I admire immensely their hard work, their discipline, and their contributions to their College.
- ❖ We are now three-quarters of the way through the most extensive athletics facilities replacement and renovation programs in the College's history. We have either added or renovated a number of facilities including the Scully-Fahey field, the Blackman practice fields, the Boss tennis facility and Gordon Pavilion, the golf course, the new ski lodge, and Leverone Field House and the squash courts. We have begun work on Alumni Gym where we will add a significant fitness center, work on the pool, renovate coaches' offices and related spaces. We are well along on the Corey Ford Rugby house and fields thanks to gifts and to substantial College resources. We are moving ahead to address issues with the Davis Varsity House, Memorial Field, and Red Rolfe Field. And a competition soccer facility is part of the capital campaign.

9. What is Dartmouth's policy toward legacies?

In my semiannual letter to the community I wrote that the admissions process should take legacy status into account when evaluating students. We currently admit legacies at least twice the rate as non-legacies. Legacies provide a generational continuity that is critical to the continued endurance of the College. I was surprised though to receive three or four responses from younger alumni who opposed this policy. Needless to say, we will not change our practice. I have always enjoyed hearing about and getting to know Dartmouth students who are the children of students I taught back in the 1970s and 1980s—eleven of them in the current freshman class.

Dartmouth alumni and alumnae cherish their relationship with the College. It is not surprising that they then want their children to have the same sort of relationship with Dartmouth, and they pass along a loyalty to the institution. So we must communicate better how we value and welcome these applicants. I have asked for a review of our programs of communication and of support—Dartmouth is a very competitive school, but we can make this process one that reaffirms that we value very much these applicants.

10. Why do we need a \$1.3 billion campaign?

Quite frankly, because of our ambitions for Dartmouth. If Dartmouth is going to continue to offer the finest undergraduate education in the country, we must continue to invest in the academic and residential life programs. To protect the quality of the education, you need to continue to invest in the College.

- ❖ We need more faculty so that every student can work individually or in small groups with faculty.
- ❖ We need more faculty if we are to remain current in areas of new knowledge. The Dartmouth curriculum must remain relevant.
- ❖ We need to be competitive in faculty compensation and support.
- ❖ We need more financial aid so that we can remain accessible and continue to provide scholarship support for all students who need it.
- ❖ We need new facilities. In addition to the projects we have begun, we are working on a life sciences building, an arts facility, new dining halls, a new residence hall and academic center at the Tuck School.

The Campaign for the Dartmouth Experience will ensure that today's and tomorrow's students will continue to have the sort of experience that generations of Dartmouth graduates have had. That is the legacy you have received and the responsibility you have assumed. We can do no less.

Each and every gift, no matter its size, is tangibly and symbolically significant for it affirms that this generation understands that we will protect the quality and extend the privilege of a Dartmouth education to those generations who follow. Dartmouth would not now be Dartmouth if our predecessors had not taken on this responsibility; our challenge and our heritage are clear.

Dartmouth will continue to admit and to educate men and women for a lifetime of leadership and responsibility. Your commitment makes that possible. It is time for us to share a pride in our common legacy and a joy in our shared responsibility.