

An Open Letter to the President

Dear President Sams,

The following questions and topics were collected based on your Oct 22nd presentation about the Residential College model and the data-driven projects for Hanover on our campus. Regarding faculty questions about the cost of Hanover, I did receive your email shortly after the Senate meeting indicating the cost of Hanover is \$45,000, thank you for providing that information.

Regarding Presidential Committees, I sent the list of staff and faculty nominations to your office on Friday Oct 29th. I understand that I will soon receive a finalized membership list for each Presidential Committee. As we discussed in person, thank you for agreeing to arrange for Presidential Committees to post minutes on the Old Westbury portal so that the ongoings of the committees are transparent to the campus community. Additionally, the Executive Committee has requested that faculty committee liaisons to Presidential Committees take on the following responsibilities, to ensure coordination with existing faculty committees.

1. Represent their constituencies (whether the committee or faculty) in Presidential Committee meetings. Sometimes this may mean asking for more time to consult, gather info, and report back.
2. Report back a sense of the deliberations of the Presidential Committees to faculty committees on a regular schedule.
3. Coordinate regular updates to the Senate regarding any important issues or deliberations being undertaken in the Presidential Committees.

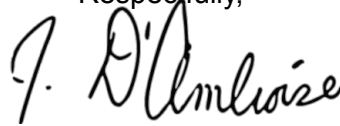
During our Oct 29th one-on-one meeting, we also discussed your new ideas for Presidential reports during Faculty Senate and Full Faculty meetings. In particular you indicated that you plan on giving a series of reports as a regular order of business, in order to engage with faculty questions and concerns on a more regular basis. Additionally you indicated that a number of “more routine” pieces of information may be transmitted in advance of the meetings in writing, in order to save time during the meeting.

Since your Oct 22nd Presidential report was originally intended as 20 minutes but it extended for about 57 minutes once Sharing of Concerns was included, especially in light of the volume of questions listed below, I have anticipated extra time for comments and questions by extending your report to 30 minutes for Friday Nov 5th. Please let me know if we can anticipate any written responses in advance of the Nov 5th Senate meeting.

As we discussed in person, we have a common interest to collaborate for effective and communicative Presidential reports within the time constraints of the Senate and Full Faculty meetings. This is a good start to our collaboration. However, as is echoed below in the feedback collected, staff may not be fully aware of and may not be notified of the Senate and Faculty meetings. If there is a way to rectify this please let me know, as I have investigated it, and have not yet discovered a way to notify all staff of my email announcements (which require registration links). Below you will find additional requests to engage more directly with staff and students on campus.

As we agreed in person, picking up your presentation with the Hanover piece may be a good place to start on Nov 5th, given that in the previous Presidential report this component was time limited. Given the scope and length of some of the questions listed below, I respectfully request that you provide written responses in advance of the Nov 5th Senate meeting for as many questions below as is feasible, with the expectation that the rest will be addressed during your meeting reports.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. D'Ambroise". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter "J" being large and prominent.

Faculty Senate Chair
J. D'Ambroise

Senate Meeting Questions Survey Results*

*Note: When feasible, overlapping questions have been consolidated below.

1. PRESIDENTIAL FORUMS & COMMUNICATION

COMMENT SUMMARY

- Presidential communications with staff and students
- Administrative communications with faculty, staff, and students
- Opportunities for anonymous comments to administration

VERBATIM COMMENTS

Although faculty senate is open to staff to attend, many are not able or don't realize this. Is it possible to hold meetings with similar topics (president's office updates) for the staff? Or instead of at Senate, perhaps in a faculty/staff town hall or a UUP meeting?

There has been a lack of open conversation about general faculty concerns, which many of us expected with a new President. Without this, it feels that we are doomed to repeat our history and forget the progress that was made. Will there be opportunities to have these conversations and to provide anonymous concerns to administrators?

Since the Senior Administration, vice presidents and deans of schools, were informed about the Residential College plan and Hanover since Dr. Sams's arrival, why did the Senior Administration not inform the faculty and staff?

Are our students being asked what they would like to see on campus and what they consider the most beneficial to them in our support?

2. PRESIDENTIAL COMMITTEES

COMMENT SUMMARY

- Process issues in the formation of Presidential Committees
- Presidential Committees parallel to current Standing Committees
- Charges to Presidential Committees not clear
- Communication and linkage to Standing Committees not clear
- Presidential Committees for faculty and student experiences, but not for staff?
- Faculty workload (Standing Committees and Presidential Committees)
 - Distribution of labor not equitable
 - Overburdening under-represented groups and women
 - Service not equitably rewarded

VERBATIM COMMENTS

Why isn't there a Presidential Committee specifically for Staff Experience? There is a committee for students, and another for faculty, but none for staff, why?

There are a number of new committees being formed, but the charge of the committee seems inconsistent with the tasks and members of those committees. In addition, there is little communication about how these committees will interact with other existing committees with similar charges. Please explain the "big picture" and how the administration will ensure consistent and efficient communication between groups with similar interests.

Faculty labor typically goes to the same faculty members, some of whom are among the lowest paid on campus. This prevents them from investing in research or other training relevant to their areas of expertise. How will the current administration

- 1) recognize the labor (often invisible) occurring on campus (and giving credit where credit is due);
- 2) ensure that committees are not dominated by faculty members who are members of marginalized social groups (i.e. overburdening underrepresented groups);
- 3) distribute labor more equitably; and 4) reward all forms of work occurring on campus?

I think the biggest issue is process. Will big, important changes be announced to key stakeholders in implementing those changes from on high without their input? Or will people be consulted and buy-in be meticulously constructed *before* big policy changes that cost lots of money are announced? Focus on process as well as product, and work within the existing institutional structure that we all believe in and have participated in constructing. We already have departments and majors and first-year experience and sophomore-specific programs; empower those. We already have faculty governance committees; work with them instead of constructing a parallel structure that will spread already overworked people even thinner and undercut the work they have been doing since before you got here

3. BUDGET

COMMENT SUMMARY

- Performance Planning
 - Questions about transparency, communication, and implementation
 - Changes to responsibilities and appropriate compensation?
 - Funding to departments?
- Transparency in resource allocations to departments

VERBATIM COMMENTS

When will the faculty and staff be able to see the overall budget of the college, where funding is going, how it's being utilized?

Is the new administration aware that changing/adding of responsibilities warrants updates to performance programs and perhaps pay increases?

Why is it that departments' budgets have been stripped to a minimum or do not have any funds? How are departments able to plan with no budget?

Who is on the Performance Planning Committee? It should be a well-represented committee since it affects the entire college.

What happened to break down silos, transparency, and better communication?

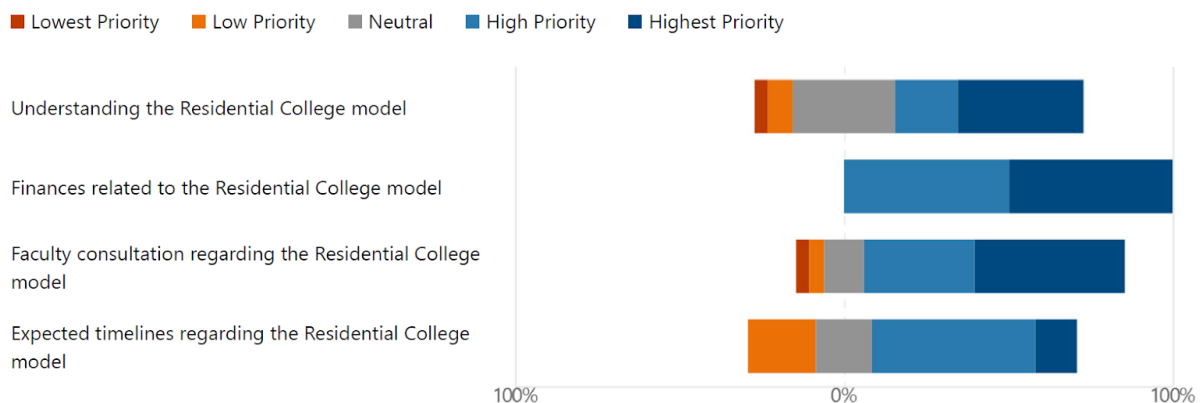
The Performance Planning Process is good in theory, but those of us who have been here often avoid these types of things because

- 1) we hesitate from straying from our areas of expertise;
- 2) historically, contributing ideas may mean that you now have the responsibility of creating and implementing the plan, and
- 3) funding is often difficult to obtain and the barriers and delays often make it impossible to complete projects as planned.

What will be different about this process? What type of help will faculty have in fine-tuning their ideas for a proposal? Will faculty be in charge of implementation?

4. RESIDENTIAL COLLEGE MODEL

2. Which topics do you feel should be prioritized in the response from the President's office?



Additional Questions about the Residential College model

TIMELINE

VERBATIM COMMENTS

Regarding the timeline, given that we won't have an enrollment strategy until after Hanover completes their research in Fall 2021, and we won't have a branding/marketing vision for that strategy until sometime in spring 2022, I'd like to know in more detail when the process of transitioning to this model will start.

FUNDING AND SUPPORT

COMMENT SUMMARY

- Residential College model implementation
 - Questions about transparency, communication, and implementation schedule
 - Changes to responsibilities for faculty and staff; and appropriate compensation not discussed
- Where will funding come from? SGA? Fees?

VERBATIM COMMENTS

Will we address problems with funding to academic departments and professional offices as well as investing in this project?

The one thing which we can all agree upon is the lack of staffing. Many of us, especially the professional staff, are wearing multiple hats and we are not being compensated with financial stipends or time.

Will this model help the College's finances? Provide more social and academic support for students?

It was specifically stated that the President intended to allocate money from the student activities fee to help fund portions of the Residential College model. The SUNY policy (https://www.suny.edu/sunypp/documents.cfm?doc_id=358) states specifically that the funds from this fee are budgeted by SGA. Does the President intend to have SGA allocate funding for faculty led programs as part of his model? And if not, how does he intend to use the fee. And if so, from what programs funded by SGA currently will be cut as a result?

And how does he plan to fund those changes? For example, OW currently only recruits actively in the Long Island and NYC area. If we were to expand to upstate New York, New England, and Mid-Atlantic areas we would need to spend more money to send our current admissions team on trips for several weeks at a time or we would have to invest in temporary regional admissions counselors or permanent regional admissions counselors. Either route takes a considerable expenditure of money. And the return on that money through student enrollment would take at least two admissions cycles since students apply a year ahead (meaning student are applying in Fall 2021 for Fall 2022 admission so those students were recruited in the Fall 2020-Spring 2021 academic year).

Faculty are already overburdened and putting in more than "100% time" with typical obligations coupled with heavy service expectations. What will be expected of faculty in the new model? How will participation in this new model be encouraged, and how might it change expectations of faculty?

CAMPUS COMMUNITY BUY-IN

COMMENT SUMMARY

- Representation on Presidential Committees related to Residential model
 - Every cohort? (commuter, resident, LGBTQ+, OSSD, CSEA, etc.)
- How will campus communication and buy-in occur?

VERBATIM COMMENTS

Will there be representation from each facet of the college when it comes to decision-making for the residential college. Every cohort, faculty, all staff...professional and CSEA, students...commuter, resident, LGBTQ+, OSSD, etc, should be represented on the committee since we are talking about a residential community.

When will students be focus grouped to discover their feelings, hopes and concerns about this new model?

How will the administration react if there is not support for the model (in other words, is this a done deal or is it a direction we will move if we have support)?

There is an important deficiency that this approach is aiming to address, as I understand it, and that is the lack of social connection on campus. I am all for efforts to get people to know each other. Maybe that happens by having them take classes together, and maybe people who are interested in the same general subject will be the kinds of people you take classes with regular. But we already have this cluster approach within the Departments, majors, and programs. Why not invest in these programs and help them

build a community within their majors? Give us social media managers, communications people to run a newsletter, funding for programming relevant to our majors, and we can create a community on campus. Give us more talented young professors so we are not stretched so thin and unable to devote our limited time to community building. Ask us what we are interested in and what we want and then enable us to do it.

ADMISSIONS, RECRUITMENT, DIVERSITY AND AFFORDABILITY

COMMENT SUMMARY

- Comparison colleges are not seen as appropriate benchmark for Old Westbury
 - Is there an example of a Residential College that serves a similar geographic area/socioeconomic & racial/ethnic profile such as our students?
- Current student population at Old Westbury are largely from geographic area/socioeconomic & racial/ethnic groups that cannot afford to live on campus or engage or spend more time on campus

VERBATIM COMMENTS

Residential Models and thematic programs where students live and study together are used at small liberal arts colleges. I heard comparisons to Amherst and Swarthmore. Will the College be raising Admissions Standards in pursuing the 'Residential Model' for SUNY Old Westbury?

It seems, even with the graphics to show inclusion of our commuter students, that this model relies heavily on on campus activities and resident students. Currently we have between 300 and 400 resident students and pre-pandemic we topped out at 800. So how does the President plan to change/alter our recruitment efforts?

How will administration ensure that the transition to the residential college model does not result in a decrease in Old Westbury's current levels of diversity and service to first generation students? The concern is that grants and donations alone will not be enough to cover the housing of hundreds or thousands of additional students, and that many of the new residential students will pay for it in their tuition. But most of our current students, from working-class families, would not be able to afford that.

Can you explain the great disparity of the students we serve and the historic precedence of Residential colleges? Is there an example of a Residential College that serves a similar geographic area/socioeconomic & racial/ethnic profile we do?

Will this model change the demographic/ target population (many of our current students will not be able to engage in this new model)?

RESIDENTIAL, COMMUTER, AND TRANSFER STUDENTS

COMMENT SUMMARY

- “Residential College” label leaves out commuter students
 - Activities planned for Residential College do not take into account commuting time, responsibilities to family, work, etc.
- Unclear how Residential model will accommodate transfer students (most students transfer in their junior year)

VERBATIM COMMENTS

At the very least, I think the fact that 2/3rds of our students are commuters we need to drop the label "Residential College" as this is a misnomer. Perhaps it could be better referred to as the "cohort model" or something to that effect?

How will the College incentivize participation for students who do not have resources (including time) to engage due to competing responsibilities (work, family, etc.)?

We have a large proportion of commuters for a reason. Why not pursuing to be the Great Commuter College? How does the Residential College model serve students who do not have time to be on campus?

Why are we using the term "residential college" to describe this model when it is not in fact referring to the residence of the students and which seems to imply that the college is going to become mostly or fully residential rather than mostly commuter?

Why does the College prioritize Residential College over supporting commuters who are unable to spend time on campus, when these time-stripped commuters comprise a large proportion of our students, are the very student body the College obliged to serve, and are in a great need of support?

How can the college's majority of student, who commute to the campus, benefit from a Residential College model that appears focused on nurturing and advancing residential students?

Will residential students receive more attention and services than commuter students? Will a residential college create two separate colleges on one campus making commuters feel like "outsiders"?

How much of this idea is about the students we have today and how much is about the students we want tomorrow? The students we have today are, by an overwhelming majority, not living on campus. They lead busy lives outside of campus, where they are parents, primary caregivers to elder family members, and work full-time jobs. The reason they are not waking up at 3am to "tinker" is because they are waking up at 3am to go to work or feed their children.

People in these kinds of situations need an opportunity to earn a degree, and that is what we offer. It doesn't always look like the traditional path of a student at Yale, Oxford, Michigan, Cornell, or Swarthmore, but it represents a large segment of the market in higher education. I think moving away from serving this community and trying to market ourselves as something akin to Hofstra will leave us in a position where we appeal to no one. Old Westbury has a reputation for offering a quality education at an affordable price and catering to people who need a second chance. I think that message appeals to a lot of people, and if we focus on providing the best possible education by investing in our faculty and getting and retaining talented people, we will rebound to where we were before the pandemic.

After reviewing the presentation, I would like to understand how our transfer students fit into the residential college model. The majority of our transfers join OW as juniors and it seems that the residential college would not allow for them to easily transition to OW. Can you explain how transfer students fit in the model. Specifics would be appreciated.

RESIDENCE HALLS

COMMENT SUMMARY

- How many students are expected to live on campus in order to make this model work?
- What is the plan on increasing the quality of the residence halls for the students?

VERBATIM COMMENTS

I have heard of numerous complaints or issues with on-campus housing (mold, homeless students in the dorms, no air conditioning, not clean, etc.). I believe, as recently as this year, a family moving their student in turned back because they were unhappy with what they saw when they arrived.

If the dorms are going to be filled as they are now, is there any concern that it could backfire, get out into the media, or possibly lead to a lawsuit?

How many students are expected to live on campus in order to make this model work? Is the college considering adding/updating res halls so that the students don't feel like they're living in a prison (AV)?

What is the plan on increasing the quality of the residence halls for the students?

I would like to state that the College has always had a residential community philosophy since its inception...and over the years it was by departments, but not necessarily as a college in its entirety. With this in mind, why not step back to observe and assess, and then support where it is needed instead of spending state funds where it is unnecessarily needed...such as new furniture when the roof leaks in the dorms, taking funds from one necessary account to pay for something that is not necessarily warranted...such as taking funds away for EAB to pay for Hanover...especially when OW knows that many of the students are in a fragile state of mind due to the severity of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

I learned that a gym is planned to be created in a small space at one of the residency halls that I toured. My personal opinion is that the space could be better utilized so I wondered how are decisions being made now and what information is being gathered to support major changes like that to ensure they are well-informed?

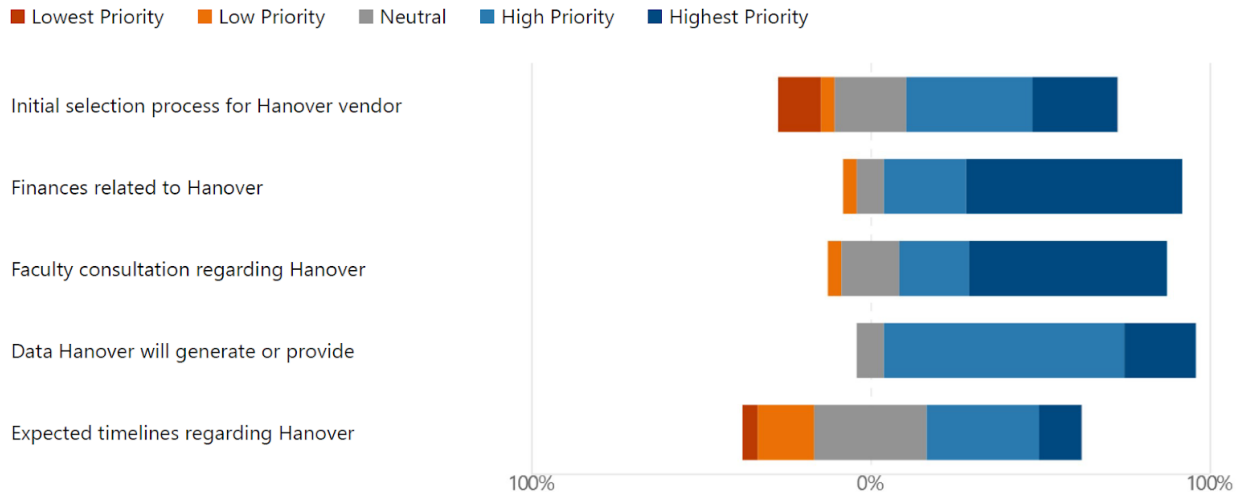
INSTRUCTION METHODS

VERBATIM COMMENTS

I'm wondering if we could go further. Lots of schools are currently re-evaluating outdated and outmoded methods of instruction and evaluation. Could we consider, say, doing away with grades (e.g., pass/fail only), doing away with exams and re-emphasizing writing and project-based instruction, or instituting a senior project of some kind that is a graduation requirement?

5. Hanover

4. Which topics do you feel should be prioritized in the response from the President's office?



Additional Questions about Hanover

DEI

VERBATIM COMMENTS

In the world of DEI, how is it that Hanover's website does not reflect a diversified staff who are the major decision-making stakeholders of the company?

WHY HANOVER: OW HISTORY AND STRATEGIC PLAN

COMMENT SUMMARY

- Why Hanover?
 - What is the expected product(s) from Hanover?
 - What is the alignment and interface of Hanover and the current strategic plan?
 - Will Hanover proposals impact recruitment and enrollment planning?
- Given lack of diversity at Hanover, will Hanover be sensitive to the historic context and mission of Old Westbury?

VERBATIM COMMENTS

Why was this company chosen? What recommends them over other vendors?

Has Hanover assisted any SUNY campus? If yes, which campus(es)? Any comprehensive colleges which reflect Old Westbury in demographics, budget and staffing?

Will Hanover be considering Old Westbury's unique history, the students it has traditionally served, and current population, it's location, and reputation in the community before making recommendations?

Will Hanover provide recommendations on how OW could counter the reputation of Old Westbury in Long Island as a "ghetto school" ?

What is the purpose of hiring a consulting company for this project? What do we hope to learn from Hanover?

What information has Hanover asked us for regarding our vision of enrollment management for OW?

Context: In the past, we had another company contracted to create a PR campaign, resulting in the tree logo and "Think Big" slogans. Faculty were not consulted in this process and there was great dissatisfaction with the result as it did not reflect the things that make us special as a College. Without transparency about the purpose of a contract with Hanover and data they will produce, it feels as if we are repeating history.

How does the contract with Hanover align with our strategic plan? What is Hanover expected to produce for the campus?

I think we have to be careful about following trends instead of leading them. I can think of one case where enrollments are declining in a major, but that is also a program that has been allowed to fester with only faculty member to run it who was approaching retirement and not looking towards future growth of the program, but nevertheless managed to keep a small number of majors engaged. You could look at that two ways: 1) you could say that's a declining program because enrollments are going down and students aren't interested in it, or 2) you could say that's a program that's reaping the fruits of underinvestment, and if we hired somebody new, they could breathe life into the program.

CONSULTATION WITH THE CAMPUS COMMUNITY

COMMENT SUMMARY

- Will there be appropriate consultation and collaboration with all units of the college?

VERBATIM COMMENTS

If Hanover will gather information and generate data on academic programs and strategic priorities, such issues are the purview of the Faculty. Under SUNY Board of Trustees Policies, college faculty have the obligation to participate significantly in the initiation, development and implementation of the educational program. The role of the Faculty in matters of academic planning goes beyond a right; it is a duty.

this was never presented to the professional staffs at Old Westbury, it is extremely hard to give opinions on a subject that was never discussed presented to us.

Will anyone from the OW enrollment services staff or institutional research be involved in the data collection and analysis project for the enrollment management section?

The proposed project in Summer 2022 is regarding academic programs and optimizing for future enrollment and identifying underperforming areas. Can you explain what you plan to do with information on an underperforming major? It was stated that the academic offerings are the purview of the faculty. If this project takes place in Summer 2022, when faculty are off contract, then how will they be involved?

How will you ensure meaningful faculty and student consultation in the process? For example, in considering the direction we could move for new majors, it seems we should consider our mission, social relevance, and the expertise of the faculty in developing areas that emphasize our social justice mission.

FUNDING

COMMENT SUMMARY

- Where is funding coming from given current fiscal constraints?
- Why wasn't using on-campus expertise considered instead?

VERBATIM COMMENTS

Traditionally OIE/IR (formally Jacob) and different faculty groups have been conducting surveys with students and faculty on issues surrounding academic programs and campus resources. Currently IR is understaffed since Jacob's position has not been replaced. Instead, the College is hiring Hanover and another external consultant for Middle States Follow-up Report. Is outsourcing institutional planning and data gathering the direction the College is going? If so, why choose this route?

Where is the money being generated from? We have been told that the college is very much in the Red, so how are we paying for this vendor?

Once Hanover is finished with their report, where will the funds come from to implement their recommendations? If we do not have the financial resources or staff to make their changes, why go through this exercise when we already have existing committees on campus which will not financially hinder the campus's growth.

Why is OW spending money on consultants instead of tapping on the knowledge of faculty and staff?