



FROM THE POLITY

Statement From the Dean: On Tutor Pay

Since the recession of 2008, and exacerbated by the pandemic, the college's traditional sources of revenue have changed. In particular, we have been moving from a more tuition driven financial model to a more philanthropic model. In making this move, we have, since 2008, lost about \$10 million in student derived revenue. That is, if we were still getting the kind of net tuition we were getting before the economy tanked in 2008, we'd have gotten a total of \$10 million more (not inflation adjusted) over these years.

As a response, the college has been undergoing austerity measures of one sort or another for 15 years. That has meant a lot of things, including faculty and staff salaries that are not where they should be. Since you have asked about tutors, I will focus on that side of things, not forgetting that many staff are also facing difficulties.

The base tutor salary is lower than it was in 2008, if we adjust for inflation. In recent years housing has become very expensive in Anne Arundel County. Tutors are finding it hard even to rent close to campus, let alone to buy a house.

The good news is that we are here, while many colleges have had to close their doors. The college has also not gone through layoffs, as others have. More good news: according to our pay scale, newer and mid-career faculty, receive "step increases," percentage increases to salary, every year. The college has always preserved these yearly increases in spite of the difficult circumstances. Also, our benefits package is quite competitive with what other places offer. Last year, the college also increased starting salaries and faculty base pay across the board for the first time in many years.

It's a complicated situation, as I said above. No one doubts that salaries are not where we would like them to be and that housing is hard to find in this area. Tutors (and staff!) face real difficulties. On the other hand, we are better off than we might have been, had the college made different choices.

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BOARD OF VISITORS AND GOVERNORS MEETS IN SANTA FE

Deficit, Tutor Pay, Enrollment and Retention, Tuition Increases, and Presidential Search Discussed

The College's Board of Visitors and Governor's fall meeting, one of the three annual meetings that rotate between the two campuses, occurred in Santa Fe this year. This meeting, the first to be chaired by Warren Spector, took place from October 19th to 21st. Most of the meetings took place behind closed doors, as is usual for the board, but topics discussed at each of the committees, along with the reports of the Board Chair, both campus presidents and deans, were presented at the Plenary Session that was open to the public. Spector's report, however, was not able to be heard, due to a technical malfunction of the meeting's livestream.

During this session, different visions of the College were outlined by its officers. Nora Demleitner, Annapolis President, presented her vision of the "student centered college as a framework that informs the whole college... a pillar that supports the program." She emphasized the needs of 21st century students, and of remembering that "all student challenges are institutional challenges." She emphasized career-oriented programs and partnerships with other institutions of higher education as ways to achieve this.

Mark Roosevelt, Santa Fe President, who is serving his last year in this position, used his address to discuss the need for the college to resist trends and maintain its contrarian identity in order to survive. "What does it mean to be contrarian?" he asked, "It's not just a different path to succeeding conventionally." He argued that St. John's cannot try to sell itself as a college whose graduates will be materially successful, since it cannot compete with other institutions for that, and it should not necessarily value that kind of success. He claimed that the college should not try to make itself selective, as a fundamental part of St. John's is recognizing that students who did not succeed in high school might be the best Johnnies. He called on the board to resist adopting the latest trends in college administration, and to embrace our unique identity.

A major topic of discussion during the board meeting was tutor pay, which has been particularly visible on the Annapolis campus due to the tutor walkouts covered elsewhere in this issue. Demleitner

announced in her statement that "tutors and staff work very hard, but we are not in a financial position to give them what they truly deserve." She said that given the budgeting constraints, the college will not be able to give them regular raises.

Annapolis Dean Susan Paalman raised the issue in her report, and called on the board to take action. She noted that base salaries have only been raised twice, and cut once, since 2008, meaning that adjusted for inflation, all tutors are making much less then they did then. Tutor pay is so low that starting tutors in Annapolis cannot find housing in the city, and actually qualify for affordable housing in Anne Arundel County, but cannot receive it because the wait list is too long. "This is a serious problem for retention and recruitment of faculty... we are nearing the point at which we cannot maintain the college like this." She closed her statement by looking at the vibrant academic life on campus in contrast with this difficult situation for tutors. "How we put together campus vibrancy with the tutor pay problems, I don't know, but it makes me wonder at the love we have for the college."

The chief reason given by the board for not raising tutor pay was the College's precarious financial situation, as reflected in its deficit, which was frequently mentioned during the meeting. Operating deficits have returned in the fiscal year 2023, although they can be covered for this year by a onetime grant of federal funding for employee retention over the Covid-19 pandemic For fiscal year 2024, the college is projecting a \$5.4m operating deficit – over \$1m more than originally budgeted, but the board hopes to reduce the total deficit to \$3.4m with tax credit money., but the board hopes to reduce it to \$3.4 million with tax credit money. Moving forward, the college will be running a \$5 million deficit in 2025, and a \$6 million deficit in 2026.

Fueling these fiscal pressures is rising inflation, raised prices of utilities, and IT costs more than expected. In particular, Buildings and Grounds costs were over budget due to many unplanned critical maintenance projects as well as unexpected price hikes in utilities.

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This Week in Seminar

Freshman:

- 10/26: Plato: Republic, IV 427D–VI 502C
- 10/30: Plato: Republic, VI 502D–VII

Sophomores:

- 10/26: Bible, Matthew
- 10/30: Bible, Luke

Juniors:

- Preceptorials

Seniors:

- Preceptorials

Friday Night Lecture:

What the Heck is Hell?

7:30 p.m., FSK Auditorium, by Annapolis Tutor Ron Haflidson

Upcoming Events:

Friday 10/27:

- Johnnie Family & Friends Weekend begins, see schedule on website for more details on events taking place this weekend.

Saturday 10/28:

- 3 pm, Mellon Patio: Fall Festival and Pie Baking Contest
- 8 pm, Great Hall: Contra Dance

Sunday 10/29:

- 6:45 pm, FSK: Great Conversations

Wednesday 11/1:

- 2:30 pm, Hodson room: ScribeAmerica info session

Tutor pay (Cont. from Page 1.)

Finally, there are many positive financial signs. Our recent capital campaign was incredibly successful and showed the generosity of our supporters. Much of that money, though, is in pledges or bequests, which are not immediately available. The board and the presidents have all recognized the need to increase salaries. I’m confident that we’ll get to where we need to be.

Susan Paalman

BVG Meeting (Cont. from Page 1.)

In order to address these budget pressures, the College is looking at various ways of increasing revenue. Given the stagnation of tuition revenue, the College aims to continue to build more on philanthropy. This year, they received a \$35 million dollar gift from the Hodson Trust for the endowment, the second largest gift in the College’s history. It brings the endowment up to about \$250 million. The net return on the endowment is also up at 12.1%, a high amount given the low risk investments the College’s endowment is invested in.

There are also several large bequests willed to the College, which it should receive in the coming years. However, this by itself is not enough to provide the revenue the College needs, and the Board voted to raise tuition and fees again by 4% this year, which is roughly on par with inflation.

Another topic discussed during the meeting was enrollment, which is looking to be a continuing challenge as the nation faces a demographic cliff of declining College-aged population. This year, enrollment in Santa Fe was below target, at 92 students in the Freshman class, while enrollment in Annapolis was 140. Applications still remain relatively strong, however, and the College hopes to pull new students through innovative application methods and recruitment of international students.

Retention was also discussed in detail, with the College looking to find ways to help support students at the College and keep them until graduation. Freshman to Sophomore retention has reached its highest level since 2018, but overall retention is still below similar institutions in the small college consortium, causing a drop in tuition revenue as well as damage to community. One way

the College hopes to address that is by a program being piloted on the Santa Fe campus called the expanded freshman year. The program will allow students to spread the work of freshman year across two semesters and a summer, meaning they would take a reduced courseload in the fall, a normal courseload in the spring, and a few classes over the summer, to be able to rejoin their classmates for sophomore year. This program aims to provide support for students who might otherwise struggle during their transition into College life. It will be open to students who chose to take the extended year from the start, as well as those who struggle at the beginning of the regular freshman year classes.

The other major topic on the board’s agenda was selection of a new president for the Santa Fe campus to replace Roosevelt. The board is committed to holding an internal and external search. So far, Santa Fe tutor and former Dean J. Walter Sterling (not to be confused with Annapolis tutor Walter Sterling) has been selected as the internal candidate search finalist, and will undergo further interview processes before the selection of a new president is made.

El’ad Nichols-Kaufman

TUTORS ORGANIZE WALKOUT TO ADVOCATE FOR HIGHER PAY

Tutors and Students Walked Out of Class Ten Minutes Early, Stand on the Quad in Protest

An unusual sight filled the quad at 2:00 this past Friday. While the space enclosed by McDowell and the pair of colonial dorms is usually thriving after classes, it generally remains vacant until 3:30, when classes come to an end. However, this Friday, hundreds of students and tutors gathered together in protest of low tutor pay.

The walkout was initiated by a letter written on October 18th by Annapolis tutors Nicholas Bellinson and Khafiz Kerimov. This letter, which was distributed by the morning of the 19th physically in campus public places and sent digitally to their students and to the entire Polity by the Delegate Council Herald, stated that the two of them would walk out “of tutorials ten minutes early and stand on the quad in protest of the ongoing neglect of tutor compensation.”

In the letter, they noted that starting salaries, which has not been subject to annual increases since 2008, have effectively dropped by \$20,000 adjusted for inflation. Kerimov and Bellinson argued that this decrease in compensation has meant that it is more difficult for tutors to do their jobs, since they are forced to live further from campus, due to high housing costs in Annapolis, giving them less time to do their work and making it harder to be properly engaged with the Polity. They also noted that lower compensation makes it much harder to recruit new tutors, especially ones from underrepresented backgrounds. The letter called on other members of the polity to join them in solidarity.

On the day of the walkout, most classes in session at the time ended ten minutes early, while some classes that were to begin at 2:20 began ten minutes late. Students and faculty made their way down to the quad. Once there, students and tutors milled around, and Bellinson and Kerimov made brief comments. Bellinson thanked people for coming out

in support, while Kerimov told the Polity members present that “What you see here is the kind of place the College is. We should be proud of ourselves. At the end of the day, this is about instruction, and keeping our instruction strong.” They both also urged students to attend their 2:20 classes, to avoid interrupting too much class time.

Student responses seemed primarily positive, with a majority of students in class at the time showing up in support. “It’s good that this many people turned up,” said DC President Helen Felbek, noting that it shows that the student body cares. “The quad is veritably tumescent,” agreed Junior and SCI representative Jack Domanski. Freshman Andy Manne noted that it often feels like tutors are backed up against a wall. “They can’t leave the College, they can’t leave our community. This is a place that we all make some kind of sacrifices for. It makes a lot of sense, if we are really as one community, that we get involved. It means a lot that the students and tutors all care about this.”

After the statements by Kerimov and Bellinson, people milled around the quad for a while, and the Sophomore music assistants organized a singing of Sicut Cervus with the classes they had brought over, which many other students joined in on. After this, most people dispersed, heading towards their next class or back to their dorms, the library or other gathering places.

Further coverage on this walkout will be found in the Gadfly coming out next week, which will feature an interview with Kerimov and Bellinson. The Collegian has asked the President and Dean for comment on the issue; the Dean’s comment can be found in the “From the Polity” section and was coordinated as a response by the President and Dean.

.El’ad Nichols-Kaufman

ABOUT THE ST. JOHN’S COLLEGIAN

The St. John’s Collegian is the weekly newspaper of St. John’s College Annapolis. We work to bring quick and timely coverage of important events going on, to help develop a more informed student body. If you’re searching for more in-depth investigations and reporting, as well as essays, art and culture, check out the Gadfly, our affiliated publication, which is published once every three weeks.

Want to submit an article? We always need more writers, whether for opinion or reporting! Submissions for news articles should be between 350-450 words, while opinion should be kept short at 300 words. Just email eanicholskaufman@sjc.edu with your article, and we will work to get it in print! Longer form articles and more in-depth exploration of ideas should go to the Gadfly, which accepts submissions at lbriner@sjc.edu.

Contributors for this issue:

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Aphorism of the Week

A man who kills one person is a murderer; a man who kills a hundred people is a murderer; and a man who kills a million people is still a murderer, only much worse than the others.