



[Student Life Initiative Home](#)

[Documents by Date...](#)

[Greek Life 1/02](#)

[Greek Life 11/01](#)

[Greek Life 10/01b](#)

[Greek Life 10/01a](#)

[President 7/01](#)

[CIDE 6/01...](#)

[Greek Life 6/01](#)

[Dean 5/01](#)

President 5/01

[Adjudication 4/01](#)

[Dean 12/00b](#)

[Dean 12/00a](#)

[Adjudication 10/00](#)

[Dean 4/00](#)

[Trustees 4/00](#)

[Alumni 4/00](#)

[Faculty 3/00](#)

[Students 3/00](#)

[Broadcast 1/00](#)

[Recommendations 1/00...](#)

[Trustees 11/99](#)

[Faculty 7/99](#)

[Alumni Council 6/99](#)

[Task Force 6/99](#)

[President 5/99](#)

[Trustees 4/99](#)

[Alumni 2/99](#)

[President 2/99](#)

[Dean 2/99](#)

[President 2/99](#)

[Trustees 2/99](#)

[Documents by Author](#)

[Press Releases...](#)

[Recent Updates...](#)

Letter to the Dartmouth Community from President James Wright

May 10, 2001

Dear Members of the Dartmouth Community:

For the past two years, we have taken steps to reaffirm our commitment to building a tolerant, open, and fair environment through the Student Life Initiative. This Initiative is about making a strong place stronger, about making our widely recognized sense of community a more comprehensive and inclusive one, and about celebrating our rich and diverse cultures. We are investing in the programs and infrastructure needed to support those important values. Enclosed with this letter is an update on our efforts and the tangible accomplishments we have achieved to date.

I would also like to address recent events of serious concern to us all. Dean Redman has now made a ruling in the Zeta Psi matter, outlined in the attached letter from Dean Larimore. Zeta Psi undermined fundamental values we hold dear. When such conduct violates our standards, the College must take action.

There is a range of Coed, Fraternity, and Sorority (CFS) organizations at Dartmouth. There are houses that are all men, all women, and coeducational. Some are nationally affiliated while others are local. Some are historically Black or Latino. Some are residential, while others are nonresidential, some are privately owned, others are owned by the College. When they issued their statement in April 2000, the Board of Trustees did not want to judge all CFS organizations based on the actions of some.

They made clear, however, that each individual organization would be expected to meet rising standards for recognition and codes of conduct -- as well as their own stated organizational objectives and standards. Recognition by the College is not a right nor does it provide a sanctuary for conduct that would be unacceptable elsewhere on campus.

After the Trustee announcement, I met with the presidents of the CFS organizations and told them that the administration would work with their organizations in meeting these new challenges. In return, we expected each of them to contribute to the community, to be supportive of our educational mission and our community values. Specifically, I said that I expected them to take action to address allegations of conduct that was demeaning to women and others, that was racist, or that was homophobic. As a community committed to fairness, respect, and openness, we have no patience with or tolerance for bigotry or demeaning behavior. I affirm here, with deep personal conviction, that Dartmouth is and will be an actively anti-sexist, anti-racist, and anti-homophobic institution and community.

We do not have a speech code at Dartmouth, but a related speech issue illustrates the way we need to confront tensions between individual rights and the values of the community. Over the past few months, some members of the Dartmouth community have revived an old debate regarding the use of the Indian symbol. In a community such as ours, one that depends so much upon mutual trust and respect,

it is hard to understand why some want still to insist that their "right" to do what they want trumps the rights, feelings, and considerations of others. We need to recognize that speech has consequences for which we must account.

We must not lose sight of our goal to ensure a healthy, productive, and ethical student life at our institution. Dartmouth students, however, are the most effective agents for change and must help define and articulate what constitutes the range of acceptable behavior.

I am committed to the success of the Student Life Initiative and I am excited about what we have already accomplished. Let us remain focused on this effort and, together, continue to build a strong and vibrant academic and social environment for Dartmouth students today and for generations to come.

Sincerely,

James Wright

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Last modified 05/12/01 - [Top of page](#)