

Hamilton College Alumni for Governance Reform

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Alexander Hamilton*

In recent years the reputation of Hamilton College has been hurt by a series of events that have resulted in severely negative press in the national media. The College hired a professor who was a member of the Raelian cult that claimed to be pursuing the cloning of human beings. Former college president Gene Tobin engaged in plagiarism and resigned. The College Honor Code specifies that academic dishonesty is a serious offense that “will often result in removal from the course, assignment of an XF for the course, or separation from the College community, or some combination of these.” Nonetheless, Tobin received a generous severance package and an endowed professorship in his name. In recent months, the Director of the Kirkland Project unilaterally appointed to the faculty Susan Rosenberg, a convicted felon whose sentence was commuted by Bill Clinton during the last days of his administration and then selected and paid an honorarium to Ward Churchill who has written and spoken that the victims of 9/11 deserved their fate as “little Eichmanns.” This Director’s acts have created an unprecedented wave of negative publicity that damaged the integrity and scholarly reputation of the school.

These events and the College’s response to them share a common thread: a failure of the school’s internal controls, policies and procedures. To our knowledge, the College has made only minor changes to the way it conducts business. We believe that more fundamental changes are necessary if the College wishes to prevent the mistakes of the recent past from being repeated. To support this goal we have formed Hamilton College Alumni For Governance Reform. Our goal is to establish that Hamilton’s primary mission is to educate its students by focusing all its energy and resources to scholarly research and pedagogical application.

We know that Hamilton is a great place with an unlimited future built on its historic strength of providing rigorous intellectual training to bright young men and women. We also believe that its weaknesses must be addressed if we want others to know our school by its many positive accomplishments. The list below is a starting point that is based on the thoughts shared by members of the Hamilton community in a variety of forums in recent weeks. We welcome and expect additional suggestions and feedback on our ideas.

In general, Hamilton should

- Reaffirm the obligation of the Trustees to safeguard the reputation and credibility of the school.
- Reaffirm the honor code as a primary indicator of Hamilton’s core values. Confirm its application as the minimum standard for students, faculty,

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- administration, and trustees with faculty and administration acknowledgement that they serve as role models for the students and community.
- Unceasingly commit to free academic inquiry and a responsible, orderly, and open exchange of ideas.
 - Maintain if not enhance the highest standards of scholarship. We expect Hamilton to make the highest and best use of its pedagogical and economic resources for the benefit of its students.
 - Demand the highest standards of leadership.

We hope to serve as a force for positive change at Hamilton, and it is in this spirit that we offer the following initial recommendations:

Safeguarding Hamilton’s reputation

We believe that access to Hamilton’s students, forum, and good name is a privilege that should only be granted after diligent and active review by the President or its nominee, accountable to the Trustees and alumni. Activities directly or indirectly sanctioned by the College under an umbrella of academic freedom and endeavor, especially those espousing violence not in self-defense would require detailed scrutiny and oversight to ensure that it meets the highest reputational, legal, and ethical standards. The opportunity to teach or to be an invited speaker at an organized forum at Hamilton is a privilege, and this privilege should be extended only after due diligence. This is not a proposal for censorship but an approach to the wise expenditure and allocation of limited assets in the pursuit of the highest standards of scholarship.

Accountability: Senior members of the administration, faculty and college spokespeople have indicated that they were “unaware” of Susan Rosenberg’s background, of Ward Churchill’s writings and of the check that was sent to Ward Churchill after President Stewart stated her belief that he would not be paid.

- We call for a review and public discussion of the actions of the Committee on Instruction of the Board of Trustees related to the Kirkland Project. The By-Laws of the Board of Trustees establishes the Committee on Instruction as a standing committee and requires that "This committee shall keep itself informed and shall advise the President and the Board on all matters relating to the educational program of the College..." In the matters of Churchill and Rosenberg the Committee has serially failed to safeguard the educational program and reputation of Hamilton.

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- The College should institute procedures to ensure that the reputation, integrity, and highest standards of scholarship of the school are adequately protected and that the administration is aware of potential hirings or speaking invitations before offers are extended. There should be checks and balances to prevent a single individual or organization from taking actions that would harm the reputation or level of scholarship of the College without the knowledge of the President or a Dean.
- The Trustees of the College are obligated to provide a proper control environment to provide adequate protection of the reputation and financial assets of the College. The College should tighten its financial controls to prevent the unauthorized expenditure of funds in the future. The College should clearly spell out the penalties for violating its policies and should consistently enforce these policies.
- A full accounting of the severance package and any and all benefits accorded to former President Tobin should be fully disclosed with a full explanation of why this package was awarded following his resignation. The Trustees are obligated to safeguard against wastage of corporate assets.

Consistency: We believe that the College should have a single set of standards that are applied fairly to administrators, faculty, staff and students; faculty and administration officials should have a higher standard since they are role models for the students. If plagiarism would result in censure or expulsion of a student, it shouldn't result in a generous severance package for a president. If a criminal background would prevent an individual from being hired by Physical Plant, the same standard should apply to the faculty.

- The College should conduct a review of its current policies and procedures and take action to eliminate inconsistencies in the manner in which these policies and procedures are applied.
- The College should require background checks for all employees.
- At a minimum, the Honor Code should apply to students, faculty and the administration alike.

Diversity: We support President Stewart's stated goal of bringing a broad range of diverse voices to campus. We'd also like to know if Hamilton is achieving that goal.

- We would like an independent panel of alumni and faculty to conduct a post audit of the speaking programs brought to campus over the last 4 years to include an analysis of money flows, department sponsorship and budgets, scholarly content, and comment on the intellectual diversity of views or perspectives.
- The College should form a panel of students, faculty, administrators, alumni and community members to oversee and provide guidance to those who wish to spend

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College funds to bring speakers to campus. This group should serve as a resource to help Hamilton achieve its goal of bringing a diverse group of world-class speakers to the Hill. The panel will serve as a resource to connect the various groups on campus who wish to bring speakers to create events where true dialogue can take place with a range of perspectives represented. The panel should also issue an annual report containing a complete list of speakers who were paid to appear at Hamilton and the panel’s views about the College’s progress in meeting its stated goals. The panel should be advisory in nature and should not have veto power over individual speakers.

Transparency: It is entirely possible that some of our assumptions about how things work at Hamilton are wrong. Our concerns and recommendations are based on what we have read and heard from members of the administration and faculty in recent months. The College can help restore the trust of alumni and others who are interested in supporting the school through greater openness and transparency about how it spends money and the internal controls it has in place.

- The College should publicly release information about the funding of the Kirkland Project and any other similar structure or group, its annual budget, its relationship to the College, the relevant governing documents, affiliated sponsors, and any restrictions that would prevent those funds from being used for other purposes.
- The College should release in entirety the final report from the group that is reviewing the Kirkland Project.
- The College should also make the Hamilton community aware of any other organizations that are operating with restricted funds.
- The College should annually release a line-item budget that includes the amount spent for each department, major events and on-campus organization.
- Beyond financial disclosure of the audited financial statements and other disclosures as may be required by law, the Trustees should consider revising its policy with an eye to much greater transparency, perhaps including certain budgetary matters and an analysis of the performance of the endowment to include financial performance, asset allocations, asset managers, and fees paid to those managers. Additionally, the College should publish its management letters accompanying its financial audit, such that the Hamilton community may be assured of proper controls.
- The College should unilaterally embrace the principles espoused in the Sarbanes-Oxley legislation.

February 17, 2005

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HCAGR is conducting an ongoing review of governance matters of Hamilton College including but not limited to Hamilton's control environment, various compliance matters, and the obligations of due care of the Trustees and principal officers. We intend to offer suggestions and candidates to reform and improve governance of Hamilton College to restore its reputation and credibility as one of the premier liberal arts institutions in the world.

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/s/ J. Hunter Brown, H '76

/s/ Peter D. Brown, H '73

/s/ Brendan McCormick, H '93

/s/ Penny Watras Dana, K'78

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