
THE SOPHIAN

February, 2024

Vol. 77

Smith College Botanic Garden Prepares for Removal of Beloved Swing Tree

JADA WORDLAW '26
NEWS WRITER

On Jan. 16, the Botanic Garden of Smith College announced that five trees on campus will be removed early this year, including the long-standing sugar maple tree on Paradise Lawn. The Smith College Grounds Department will relocate the swing, popular among Smithies and non-Smithies alike, to another tree on the college's campus. In the coming months, two trees will begin growing in its place — potentially hosting a new swing in the years to come.

According to the Botanic Garden, the sugar maple's health has been cautiously monitored for several years. The decision for any tree's removal on Smith campus is a long and thoughtful process.

continued on page 3



PHOTO COURTESY OF SMITH COLLEGE BOTANIC GARDEN

The Unseen and Unpaid Labor of Smith Athletics

HILLARY CONNOR '26 Smith Athletics boasts a mission committed to
SPORTS & WELLNESS
EDITOR

“prioritizing diversity, equity and inclusion” for both student-athletes and staff, but behind the scenes, Smith College Athletic Department is dependent on the unpaid labor of the graduate student assistant coaches.

The graduate students concurrently take classes to receive their masters degree in Exercise and Sports Science (ESS) and gain coaching experience in the field with one of Smith's 11 varsity athletics teams or the Strength and

Conditioning and Athletic Training departments.

With a steep tuition cost of \$46,820 per academic year for the two-year program, without housing or meal stipends, the program requires a level of financial support that is inaccessible to many potential candidates. This has been an ongoing topic of concern for students, as the program description states it was founded on the principle of getting more women and individuals with other marginalized identities into coaching and sport administrative positions, but

the lack of funding is contradictory to this mission.

The graduate assistant coaches (GAs) receive three to four credits per semester for coaching rather than being paid for their work. On top of their coaching commitment, they also take a course load equivalent to that of a full-time undergraduate student. Since one credit hour is equivalent to three hours of work for the week, the coaches get compensated with credit hours for 12-16 hours of work per week under this system.

continued on page 4

Reflections on Endings and Beginnings

Dear Readers,

We, the members of the 2023–2024 Editorial Board, are proud to present the first iteration of our print issues for the spring 2024 semester. Although we are at the beginning of a new semester, and with that, comes many opportunities, our time together as a board is reaching

2023-2024 Editorial Board

Editor-in-Chief: Phoebe Rak '24

Managing Editor: Isabel Birge '25

Business Manager: Louise Michel '24

Features Editor: Amaya Boulanger '26

Opinions Editor:

Karen Colmán Martínez '26

News Editors: Pilar Lu-Heda '26 &

Ciara McAuliffe '26

Arts & Culture Editors: Georgia Pickard '26 & Sophia Haydon-Khan '25

Sports & Wellness Editor:

Hillary Connor '26

Photo Editor: Ciara McAuliffe '26

Layout Editor: Isabel Birge '25

Crossword & Games Editor:

Skylar Ball '26

Translations Editor: Zéphyr Smith '26

Asst. Games Editor: Maisy Hoffman '25

Asst. Layout Editor: Isabella Chen '27

Social Media Manager: Pilar Lu-Heda '26

its end. As we prepare for this transition in the next couple of months, we are filled with gratitude for all we have been able to accomplish — thanks to our hard-working staff — during our tenure.

Chief among these new strides is our new by-mail subscription program. This program has extended the visibility of our publication to the ever-growing ranks of alumni, as well as others who are interested in the goings-on of Smith College. In the first few months after launching the program, we received an overwhelming amount of interest from all across the country, many of them Smithies. We are thrilled to continue to expand our reach beyond the student body of Smith.

We, at Smith, have seen many changes emerge with the new academic term. Now, as they walk from the Quad to central campus, students are faced with the very beginning of the construction of Kathleen McCartney Hall. Named for Smith's former president, the building will house both the Lazarus Center for Career Development and the Wurtele Center for Leadership. One of the objectives of the building will be to "[advance] the college's vision for providing students with the skills and qualities of mind to explore and pursue their purpose in an evolving world." Despite the college's enthusiasm towards the new project, the budget of \$32 million raises questions about the allocation of resources.

There are hundreds of student leadership positions that, despite the tremendous amount of labor they do on behalf of the college, remain

unpaid: Gold Key tour guides, house presidents, Heads of New Students (HONS), student government officers and, not to mention, members of The Sophian Editorial Board. Moreover, Smith remains in a student housing crisis. There are currently students living in forced triple and quadruple dorms due to an inadequate number of rooms being available. Needless to say, the building of Kathleen McCartney Hall gives us much to consider in terms of the college's priorities.

As student journalists, we have an ongoing responsibility to provide the Smith community with accurate, focused reporting as well as to illuminate the voices of the student body. That being said, we would like to encourage students to submit their guest essays to The Sophian. The more voices we can amplify through our publication, the stronger we will be. As always, thank you to our readers for your continued support.

With gratitude,

Phoebe Rak '24
Editor-in-Chief
Isabel Birge '25
Managing Editor

This Issue

Page 3 - Smith College Botanic Garden Prepares for Removal of Beloved Swing Tree – *continued from page 1*

Pages 4–5 - The Unseen and Unpaid Labor of Smith Athletics – *continued from page 1*

Page 6 - Sex, Love & Surrogacy in 'Chutney Popcorn'

Page 7 - Brigitte Buettner Reflects on a Decorated Career at Smith

Page 8 - Our endowment is our future, but what about our present?

S Advertise with us!



 **SCAN ME**

Smith College Botanic Garden Prepares for Removal of Beloved Swing Tree

JADA WORDLAW '26
NEWS WRITER

Using methodology from the International Society of Arboriculture, the Botanic Garden created the Botanic Garden of Smith College Tree Risk Management Plan — the protocol and response for assessing a tree on campus — to standardize its risk management practices.

“What we’re really worried about, more than anything else, is a tree or tree part causing harm,” said John Berryhill, current Interim Director of the Botanic Garden and prior Landscape Curator and Chief Arborist of the college. “Harm to trees, harm to property and, most importantly, harm to people.”

Without an outlined plan for monitoring trees on campus over time, Smith’s arboriculture team was unable to determine whether a tree could shift from low risk to high risk. Upon the plan’s development in the last four or five years, however, Berryhill has seen a remarkable increase in its use, even beyond Smith. “[Our plan] is being used as the blueprint for the risk management plan at New York Central Park, at the Smithsonian Institution, at the National Gallery of Art, Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden, Naples Botanical Garden, [Walnut] Point Arboretum,” he explained. “World class institutions, municipalities and cultural institutions are using the Smith plan as the gold standard.”

Smith’s reputation as a botanic garden and campus arboretum began in Clark Seelye’s presidency. In 1895, the college became the first to create an “integrated model” of an arboretum by planting trees throughout the entirety of its landscape. Smith’s diverse collection has thrived for well over a century and continues to do so at the hands of the Botanic Garden, who make clear their continuing environmental awareness. “You’re living in a botanic garden. Not many people get to say that,” said Berryhill.

When asked about the swing tree above Paradise Pond, Berryhill had much to say about its journey on Smith campus. “We knew that the decay in the tree was extensive enough — and this started decades ago, probably before I was born,” he said. Last fall, risk calculations for the sugar maple increased to a point where it was time to reconsider its classification as a “low risk” tree in a 12 month time frame.

The sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*) is native to the New England region; so it is unclear whether it was intentionally planted or grew on its own. “Let’s say it’s 80 years old and was planted in 1940-ish or late 1940s...that idea of having a beautiful fall foliage shade tree on a spot where people want to sit and look down, the sun reflecting on the water...it was a good choice. Whether it was nature or somebody’s decision,” said Berryhill.

The Botanic Garden’s announcement of the tree’s removal has been met with bittersweet reactions from Smithies, for many of whom their memories with the tree have held formative campus experiences.

The Botanic Garden’s announcement of the tree’s removal has been met with bittersweet reactions from Smithies, for many of whom their memories with the tree have held formative campus experiences. An influx of community members have reached out with questions and concerns related to the tree.

Berryhill had many interactions, but one in particular stood out to him. “I had a former intern reach out from Houston saying, ‘When is it coming down? A couple of us might want to

come up and see it,’” he said. “It’s just an amazing testament to how much trees can affect your sense of what a place is. And that’s certainly something I’ve felt deeper and deeper every year here.”

Berryhill also reflected on his appreciation for trees. “That a beautiful tree that defined this space for decades disappears and nobody notices, is sort of a heartbreaking idea for me.” The sugar maple’s impact on the Smith community is undeniable; its removal, clearly, will not uproot the memories it holds.

“We’re trying to think 100 years down the road in terms of what we replant there,” said Berryhill on the Botanic Garden’s plans for the lawn’s future. “We’re not just thinking a decade ahead, but really trying to plant something that, at its best, I won’t be alive to see.”



PHOTO BY JADA WORDLAW '26

The Unseen and Unpaid Labor of Smith Athletics

HILLARY CONNOR '26

SPORTS & WELLNESS EDITOR
continued from page 1

However, most sports meet at least six times per week for upwards of three hours per day, not including travel time for competitions. This has the coaches working 18 hours per week at a minimum, without factoring in recruiting responsibilities, administrative tasks, individual meetings with athletes and other tasks designated by their head coach.

Many GAs recognized this discrepancy and are attempting to communicate how this uncompensated labor is a burden not only on their own lives, but also limits what they can contribute to the program.

Cross Country and Track and Field Graduate Assistant Coach Haley Markos '20 was a three-season student-athlete during her time at Smith and now is in her second year of the program. Markos began tracking her coaching hours during J-Term to present to the department.

Markos reported that she worked fewer hours than usual over J-Term because there were limited competitions over the break, yet she still clocked 25-30 hours per week.

"It feels hard for me to track," Markos said. "There are so many moments where I'm in between classes and I come down and do something for 45 minutes, or it's a Sunday afternoon, and next thing I know, I did something for an

hour and a half, but it's kind of in my free time."

She stated that due to the immense time commitment, "Unfortunately coaching is the priority and the academics come secondary. I'm not able to bring my best self to the classroom because I need to do that at practice and meets or otherwise I'm letting other people down."

Markos is in-season year-round, serving as assistant coach for both cross country and

We're not paid to be in that leadership role," she said.

"The school's identity is as an undergraduate institution, and because of that, the grad students are often overlooked. We are treated like students when it's convenient and financially profitable for the school and we're treated like staff when it's convenient or more financially profitable...we're never included in bonuses

during the holidays or during the COVID-19 pandemic or receive meal plans or housing, so it's just really contradictory all the time."

Markos also noted that since the graduate assistants are younger and some of them are also student-athletes, the students lean on them more for mental health support.

She said, "I know as a student-athlete, we lean on the GAs at certain times as crutches or as people we trust to handle really serious personal information. I've now been in the position where I've had serious conversations with people before that

are confidential or aren't wanted to get back to the head coach. We're holding space for a lot of things at the same time, we're told we are and should be acting like full-time assistant coaching, but aren't getting that compensation."

She reflected on her experiences' relationship to the mission of the program; "As coaches, we're in a position of power, and it's our responsibility to open doors for other people to access that level of power, and I think it's really hypocritical that that's what we're learning and we're



PHOTO COURTESY OF SMITH COLLEGE ATHLETICS

track. This year, she is the only GA coaching the distance team, which she attributes to the falling numbers in graduate applications since her time as a student-athlete. Due to the lack of GAs and other paid coaching positions, Markos is also the new throwing coach for track, which is exciting for Markos, but also requires a greater time commitment.

"You're used to filling a certain gap for the program which can be an exciting learning opportunity, but it's not really accounted for.

opening doors for women to get into coaching, yet isn't really able to keep up with that demand by even giving people a livable wage at a minimum."

"Coaching is an underpaid position already. It's not setting us up for success in the future career if we're already going into debt and tapping into savings at such a young age when we're working as much as we are," she continued.

In addition to coaching and academics, each student is required to teach one one-credit course per semester to keep the ESS program running. They receive a stipend for their work as professors. Up until the fall 2023 semester, GAs were also required to fulfill a certain level of work hours at home games or in other building administration tasks such as 70 hours per year and at least one three hour shift in the equipment booth completely uncompensated. This requirement has now been altered so the number of hours is up to the student and they receive minimum wage for this work.

One of the strength and conditioning coaches (who has chosen to remain anonymous) spoke on the inherent flaws of the stipend. They said, "The biggest thing I think that we've felt a struggle with in the last year or two is the lack of transparency. Each of us gets a different stipend, which is odd because we're all teaching the same amount of classes. What we were told was if you have two GAs, your sport is allotted \$14,000 or \$12,000 to split, which is why I was told I was getting \$6,000 per year instead of the full \$12,000 because we have two GAs in strength and conditioning. I've since come to find out that even sports with one GA are sometimes still getting \$6,000 and some sports that have two GAs are each getting \$12,000 or \$14,000, so it's not transparent, and we can't figure out why they're getting paid more."

The coach said that the lack of transparency is likely a result of the multifaceted nature of the athletics department. "Part of the issue," they explained, "is that it's categorized under so many different organizations within Smith like athletics and the graduate program; we can't figure out who to ask and how to get a straight answer from anyone about where our money actually comes from or what we're being paid for."

The coach said that while they didn't want to expose which sports were getting paid more, they stated that some sports are helping their GAs make up the difference in pay through sports camps or other fundraisers organized by the sport's head coaches.

This coach reported having to work as a personal trainer outside of the program, and stated, "Most people I know work outside hours of their coaching and teaching to make some extra money to be able to afford rent and food."

The coach said that the lack of transparency is likely a result of the multifaceted nature of the athletics department. "Part of the issue," they explained, "is that it's categorized under so many different organizations within Smith like athletics and the graduate program; we can't figure out who to ask and how to get a straight answer from anyone about where our money actually comes from or what we're being paid for."

But even this extra work is not enough, they said. "Currently the funding process for our program is very exclusionary. Anyone who comes from a lower income background probably could not afford the program on their own. I grew up low-income, and my family has very fortunately had a shift in our finances...so they've been able to support me, but I've often recognized that if we had the finances right now that my family had in high school, I never would have been able to do this program."

They expressed that while they are grateful to have the opportunity to have an outside job to pay for the program, the time commitment reduces their ability to best serve their athletes. "Whenever I'm taking extra time to personal train to make extra money for myself I am taking

some time away from my coaching hours."

The GAs, in a presentation to the department, calculated, by converting their hours worked to minimum wage in Northampton (\$14/hour), that each GA is contributing around \$320,000 worth of work per year for the college and, on average, is receiving a stipend of \$6,000 in addition to paying \$5,000 per year out-of-pocket (after financial aid and scholarships).

They are proposing to the department, "a model that requires no tuition money and rewards all students with a \$10,000 fellowship, regardless of outside duties performed. Additional money could be offered to students who are able to teach courses and/or who need additional funding to attend the program. We will also make more effort to provide supports such as meals on campus, information on local affordable housing options, accessing EBT and applying for appropriate loans."

This is not unreasonable in comparison to other comparable liberal arts institutions. They reported in their presentation that, "NESCAC schools pay an average of 25 assistant coaches on women's teams \$14,000 each. NEWMAC schools pay an average of 18 assistant coaches \$9,000 each."

Overall, the program has been widely successful at setting up students with coaching jobs at prestigious institutions directly after graduation, including Brown University, Columbia University, Harvard University and many more. However, the GAs claim that in order for the program to continue its mission of increasing diversity in coaching and sports leadership positions, their labor for the department and the college must be adequately compensated.

Sex, Love & Surrogacy in “Chutney Popcorn”

MINHA VIRK '25 Reena makes an honest living. She spends her days working at a New York City salon, giving white girls mehndi tramp stamps in between botched leg waxes and haircuts. Brown lines drawn across white bodies. She takes each client's photograph when she's done. Photography is Reena's dream. Maybe some of that dream is pure creativity, but more than that, these images capture Reena's life in New York. A life so many have convinced her is rarely lived and few have captured. The photographs are rushed, washed out by the fluorescent salon lights and blue-tinged 35mm. At first glance, it's all slightly ill-fitting, but believing in Nisha Ganatra's 1999 film, “Chutney Popcorn” means believing in all that Reena believes in.

Sharing their closet of kurtas, striped shirts, and leather jackets, Lisa and Reena are living a 90s multiculturalist lesbian dream. They're committed to each other, but the pair, especially Lisa, refuse to let settling down mean that they've lost their edge or their youth. So, their plans start veering off course



PHOTO COURTESY OF NISHA GANATRA

when Reena decides, against truly everyone's advice, to carry a child for her newlywed sister, Sarita, who cannot conceive. Cleverly playing with typical values and stereotypes of both lesbian and South Asian-American communities, “Chutney Popcorn” tells a story about love, obligation, and one woman's pursuit to make everything painfully awkward for the ones she holds most near — all in the name of proving that she cares for them.

From the start, there is a clear disconnect between Reena's queer life in New York and her cultural community, one that often leads her mother, Meenu, to assume Reena is not invested in her family. At Sarita's wedding, Reena rolls in so late that the bride and groom have already

left the party. She arrives with Lisa in hand, on her motorcycle all the way from the city to suburban Jersey. This makes Reena's offer to get pregnant, merely a few weeks later, particularly perplexing for Sarita, Meenu and Lisa.

There are frequent moments in the film where both Reena's family in Jersey and her circle of city lesbians draw out the point that the lifestyle Reena has wanted so badly for herself as a lesbian is simply not compatible with pregnancy or worse yet, motherhood. Meenu thinks a marriage makes a mother. Sarita thinks a pregnancy makes a mother. Lisa thinks a mother makes for a lesbian bed death. In its characters' own assumptions, “Chutney Pop-

corn” begins to unravel these stereotypes of what makes a successful mother, a self-loving lesbian, or a modern but not too modern South Asian woman. Pregnant, Reena spends her days clad in overalls with her lesbian roommates discussing how the thickness of a woman's socks can tell you if she's gay or not. The movie is full of little moments like these, circumstances which present a seemingly ordinary life lived in the bodies and places that we've convinced ourselves aren't built for it.

The first time I watched “Chutney Popcorn,” it changed my life, just a little bit. Like most queer people of color, I had grown up expecting very little from the sapphic movies I watched, as much as I still loved them. While this joy of seeing oneself represented is a symptom of a much bigger prob-

lem in the film industry and the lesbian genre, I don't believe it discounts how special the movie is. Although not a technical masterpiece, “Chutney Popcorn” impresses me on every rewatch. The narrative is daring, particularly for the era it was made in. It tackles a myriad of family and social dynamics with an effortless sense of humor and deep care for all of its characters. Even now, I find few films that are willing to lean into exploring queer, Asian-American experience as something that can be joyful, funny and frankly, a little bit ridiculous at times.

Ganatra's youth further contextualizes its low-budget visual style, as she created and starred in the film at only 26. It bears a unique coziness in its cinematography, a by-product of its amateur feel, that invites you into Reena's world and her art, her antics and all of her love that she is learning how to give. One of these moments, which really makes me root for Reena, comes early in the film. Home from a long day at the salon, she lies in bed with Lisa, valiantly playing the role of big spoon with one arm and touching up Lisa's henna tattoo with the other. The pair dream up a life together. Nothing too ambi-

tious, just something that will last.

Much like Reena when it comes to her photos, “Chutney Popcorn” is preoccupied with the idea of permanence. This film makes me wonder why we choose to tell the stories we do, especially the ones that are strange and hard to explain. Sometimes the movies are our most effective tool for making sense of a particular moment in time. But more than that, they leave a trace. As she makes a work so specific to its time, Ganatra gives us a chance to keep remembering. “Chutney Popcorn” is a work that is meant to be cared for and held on to, and while I wait for the world and for cinema to change, I find comfort in knowing that this film has built a place for us to wait till it happens.

Professor Brigitte Buettner Reflects on a Decorated Career at Smith

ISABEL BIRGE '25
MANAGING EDITOR

Professor Brigitte Buettner began teaching art history at Smith College in 1990. After an academic career filled with wonder, excitement and surprises, Buettner plans to retire at the end of the 2024 spring semester.

Buettner completed her undergraduate degree in art history at L'Université Paris-Nanterre — the alma mater of French President Emmanuel Macron. As a first-generation college student having always been drawn to the visual aspect of art, Buettner easily found her way into art history. In my conversation with her, she emphasized the many differences between the education system in France and that of the United States.

She loves teaching at Smith, in part, because of how radically different the American liberal arts education is from what she experienced in Paris. She cited the ability to form mentorship relationships with faculty as one of the things she appreciates most about Smith. This was something she lacked when working towards her undergraduate degree.

"It was all huge classes; there was no individual attention...I wish I had had the kind of attention that we provide to students here. It's just phenomenal, which is why we encourage students to avail themselves," she explained.

She went on to pursue a doctorate degree in art history at L'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris through the typical progression of the European higher education system.

"You go from year to year, and then all of a sudden, you're in a Ph.D. program without ever knowing exactly why," she reflected.

She began her graduate career studying contemporary art. However, after finding an advisor with whom she was excited to work, Buettner ended up focusing on medieval art. In particular, she specialized in illuminated manuscripts, which are hand-crafted, lavishly illustrated texts produced during the medieval period.

Her first job out of graduate school was documenting medieval manuscripts in the research unit at the Getty Center in Los Angeles.

Buettner attributed her landing that post to a "pure, random act of kindness." She described the difficulty — despair, even — she had experienced in trying to find a job in academia right out of graduate school.

She similarly recognized the "accidental"



PHOTO COURTESY OF SMITH COLLEGE

Now, after 34 years at Smith, Buettner answered without hesitation that it is the students that have been her favorite part of teaching. In addition to advising her students on academic matters, she sees great value in sharing her own, non-linear academic journey with them.

aspect to her joining the Smith faculty given the scarcity of faculty positions available in higher education. During the interview process for the position, she had to give her first public talk in English.

Now, after 34 years at Smith, Buettner answered without hesitation that it is the students that have been her favorite part of teaching. In

addition to advising her students on academic matters, she sees great value in sharing her own, non-linear academic journey with them.

"I'm an example of someone who has not had a straight trajectory. Everything was a little bit happenstance...It wasn't like I decided, when I was finishing my Ph.D., 'I'm going to be working at the other end of the world.'"

And yet, here she is. In addition to her expertise in medieval manuscripts, Buettner's research at Smith has taken her in a slightly different direction. She describes this shift in her focus with no small amount of serendipity.

It all began with a class she taught on reliquaries. She recalled that in one of the first iterations of the class (around 1993, she estimated), a student asked a question about the prominence of gems adorning medieval reliquaries. That was the spark, Buettner said.

"I couldn't answer, and I didn't know where to go for answers. So I worked on that for a good 20 years," she said.

She plans on continuing this research into her retirement. She has also grown increasingly interested in the ethics around the transmission of medieval objects. Part of her current research is concerned with how medieval art has been co-opted to serve modern political agendas from the age of Napoleon to the Nazi era in Germany. Buettner explained that this is a project that has been undertaken for Greco-Roman art, but seldom for medieval art.

One of a handful of professors representing the small, but mighty Medieval Studies department, Buettner has also enjoyed the flexibility she has at Smith to engage in transhistorical explorations of art, particularly through the introductory course, Art and Its Histories.

Although she thoroughly appreciates the richness of her time at Smith, Buettner is excited for what is to come.

Our endowment is our future, but what about our present?

KAREN COLMÁN-MARTÍNEZ '26
OPINIONS EDITOR

A couple of years ago, media outlets including The Nation and The Washington Post were referring to the latest wisecrack (a clever or sarcastic remark) about Harvard University: the ivy-league institution had turned into a hedge fund with a university attached to it. Students called upon Harvard to 'unhedge' its endowment while others praised its financial planning strategies. An open letter in The Atlantic called it a 'brand problem' yet also a 'literal truth.' This characterization underscores a broader trend among universities and colleges, the apparent intent to accumulate the largest endowment ever seen. Maybe we should start thinking about how, and what we are getting this money for.

In recent years, the conversation concerning the intersection and contradiction between financial planning and institutional core values has regained cultural momentum as students throughout the country have called for their respective institutions to implement divestment strategies and take a closer look at the way colleges manage their investment portfolios.

Over the past year, there has been significant scrutiny regarding the ethical implications of Smith College's asset management strategies. This focus has particularly centered on Smith's choice to maintain investments in packages that include assets from defense contractors like L3Harris. Smith's investment portfolio is ethically dubious. However, the issue of resource allocation at Smith extends further than that. Smith says our endowment is our future, but what about our present?

On Dec. 7, 2023, a faculty discussion led by Executive Vice President for Finance and Administration David DeSwert took place in Weinstein Auditorium. The panel, titled 'Budget presentation to faculty from the President,' opened with the college's financial goals for the academic year, such as 'responsible spending' and 'intergenerational equity.' The presentation also featured a summary of the college's spending and revenue for the fiscal year 2023. The college was said to be in a 'strong financial position' and has had a budget surplus for the last two years.

Smith's endowment, as of 2023, was \$2.5 billion, and its operating budget in 2022 was approximately \$285 million. Going by the numbers, we are doing great.

The numbers don't really matter, though. During the faculty discussion, faculty complained specifically about the lack of support staff for faculty and the administrative overbloat. In recent years, students have voiced concerns about various issues, including insufficient funding for the Mwangi Center, understaffing at the Office of Disability Services (ODS), elevator malfunctions on campus, classroom leaks, inadequate staffing at the Schacht Center for Health and Wellness (Smith's only health center, which currently operates from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and is closed on weekends), shortages in dining staff (recalling last year's negotiations), insufficient housing and more.

Being conservative with our endowment is counterproductive. Instead of putting our money in a safe box, we should be making a bet with it: not on the market, but on the potential of students and faculty. We need to stop viewing our endowment as a piggy bank for the future and start seeing it as a source of possibilities for the present.

If the numbers were representative of reality, Smith College dining staff wouldn't be at a 'breaking point' due to understaffing every time contract negotiation comes around. Moreover, if this were the case, professors wouldn't complain about hiring issues or lack of support staff. Vice President of Finance David DeSwert boasted that Smith spent most of its operating budget on compensation, but is this money spent on competitive salaries for academic faculty or the multiple six-figure salaries of administrative staff and their

executive assistants?

During the COVID-19 pandemic, rather than implementing hiring freezes and cutting department costs, this is money that could have been used instead of invested in bonds and non-liquid assets. When money is directly invested into the college, it is in the form of a \$32 million building to house 'Student Leadership & Career Development services.' This is no surprise, though, considering Smith's 2022 financial reporting summary highlighted 'career services' and 'sustainability initiatives' as key strategic priorities for 2023.

It might be enough for donors throwing millions at the Lazarus Center for Career Development. For many students and I, though, graphs and data on a PowerPoint slide deck claiming financial success don't make a difference. I am not a shareholder; I am a student who does not expect a high return over investment ratio, but a quality education at an institution that respects the people that make up the college's "human-intensive environment." The accumulation of wealth Smith is pursuing is to be perpetually built for a future we, current students, will not see become a reality. Our present is being forsaken for long-term investment returns.

Being conservative with our endowment is counterproductive. Instead of putting our money in a safe box, we should be making a bet with it: not on the market, but on the potential of students and faculty. We need to stop viewing our endowment as a piggy bank for the future and start seeing it as a source of possibilities for the present. Stop mitigating risks that an academic institution is meant to take: scholarships, research, expanding academic departments. Stop making risky bets on the market and start making risky bets on campus. Our endowment is worth nothing if it only serves the pages of a financial report.