

THE SOPHIAN



PHOTO BY BROOKE CHANDLER '25 COURTESY OF SMITH COLLEGE

Have You Met Webster?

BROOKE CHANDLER '25 Over the last few years, Webster, an eight-year-old English lab, has been coined as the “unofficial mascot” of Smith College. Sporting a variety of colorful bandanas during the day and an LED light-up harness at night, Webster walks around campus with his owner, Robert Abuza.

English labs are known for their boxy heads, according to Abuza. Because of his head shape, Webster often appears to have a big grin.

“Students seem to like him because he always looks like he’s smiling,” he explained.

“He was the smallest and mellowest in the litter,” said Abuza. “My youngest daughter and wife got him so I would exercise.”

Abuza’s daughter, Rebecca, named him after Webster Brook in Maine, the state where she now resides.

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Smith College Inaugurates 12th President Sarah Willie-LeBreton

BROOKLYN QUALLEN '24 Sarah Willie-LeBreton was inaugurated as Smith College’s 12th president on Oct. 21, 2023. Her inauguration was the culmination of a two-day celebration across campus that included lectures, art installations, musical performances and a dance party. Willie-LeBreton was selected as President last spring after a lengthy process. While she has been acting as president since the beginning of the semester, she did not formally take office until Saturday Oct. 21.

The Indoor Track and Tennis Facility (ITT), where the ceremony was held, was packed with Smith faculty, staff and students,

as well as members of the larger Northampton community. Many people joined via the livestream, too.

“There have only been 12 inaugurations,” said Isa Lentz '26J, who brought a family member. “It’s cool to have one during my time here.”

The ceremony began at 2:00 p.m., when the procession of faculty members in full regalia made their way to the stage, Willie-LeBreton among them. Willie-LeBreton was introduced by a number of Smith faculty and staff, as well as the chair of the Board of Trustees Alison Overseth '80. Also included in the greetings were virtual welcomes from Ruth J. Simmons,

President Emerita (1995-2001), and Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts.

After remarks from Gina-Louise Sciarra '96, Mayor of Northampton, and two of Willie-LeBreton’s former colleagues, former presidents of Smith presented her with the symbols of office. Then, Willie-LeBreton took to the podium to give her inaugural address.

“This is a challenging time to be in higher education, whether you are a student, a faculty member, a staff member or a president,” she began. “My conviction is clear. Education is essential if we are to create a just world, and my charge is to steward this community towards its ongoing potential.”

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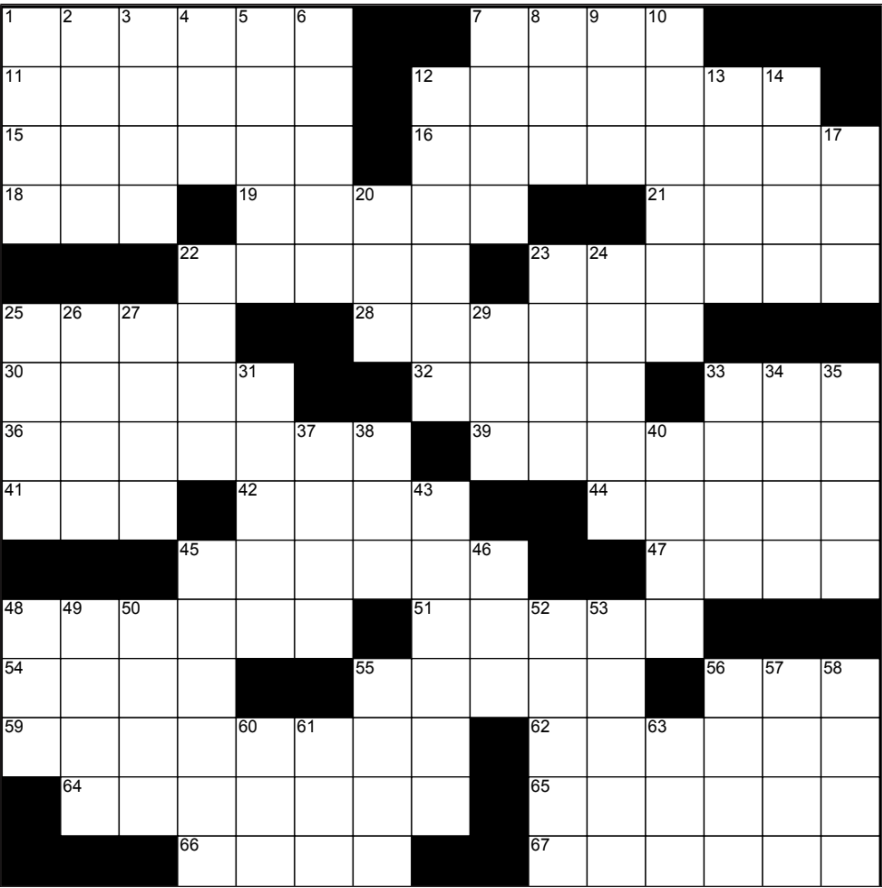
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MAISY HOFFMAN '25 ASSISTANT CROSSWORD EDITOR

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Dear Dedicated Sophian Readers,

We are proud to present our October publication, the second print edition of the year. With the Northampton municipal elections coming to a close, The Sophian has prioritized covering these races. We believe it is vital to inform Smithies and community members about local politics and local elections.

As such, we, the Managing Editor and Editor-in-Chief of The Sophian, would like to endorse the following candidates for the City Council At-Large seats: Garrick Perry and Marissa Elkins. Perry, a current Ward 4 councilor, is the second African American man to be a ward council member and is running on a

platform of diversity, supporting arts and culture in downtown Northampton and supporting local schools. We also endorse Elkins, a current at-large councilor, who is prioritizing the climate crisis, police reform and the redesign of downtown Northampton. Elkins serves as a member of the zoning committee and advocated to establish by-right zoning for two-family homes in all areas of the city. Housing and finding creative solutions to the housing crisis is a priority for Elkins.

Smithies will greatly benefit from improved housing options, a revitalized downtown and a pragmatic approach to the climate crisis. We believe that Elkins and Perry would repre-

sent Smithies well and The Sophian is proud to support their candidacies.

Participating in local elections is of increasing importance and we hope that Smithies, Northampton voters or not, will engage in local politics and recognize that they have a role in the Northampton community regardless of their ability to cast a ballot.

With Gratitude,
Phoebe Rak
Editor-in-Chief

Isabel Birge
Managing Editor

Smith College Inaugurates its 12th President Sarah Willie-LeBreton

BROOKLYN QUALLEN '24
NEWS WRITER

continued from page 1 Willie-LeBreton focused on the importance of Smith's liberal arts-style curriculum, saying that "the liberal arts education we provide is a perfect antidote to the division, threats to democracy, diminishing of rights and freedoms, violent and natural catastrophes to which we wake up on a daily basis."

"Smith is a college of and for the world," she said, listing the names of notable alumnae such as Evelyn Boyd Granville '45, one of NASA's "hidden figures," and Tammy Baldwin '84, a Wisconsin senator, both of whom contributed greatly to their fields. She called on them to demonstrate the relevance of a Smith-style curriculum that "leverages synergies among the social sciences, arts and humanities and natural sciences."

Throughout her speech, Willie-LeBreton repeated her call to action to educators and students alike. "Yes, it is a difficult time to be in higher education," she said. "But at Smith, [...] we will not be distracted from our work, because we know that the world yearns for interventions and solutions that lift up communities and make us better."

"As educators, we have an opportunity to prepare students, our future leaders, for a new paradigm of living together harmoniously," she said. She stressed the importance of justice to that paradigm, saying, "We have an opportunity to challenge the narrative of winners and losers and emphasize instead a collective sense of justice and the recognition that as a people, we have enough. Indeed, we have enough to share."

"Today, it is my hope that the spirit of Sophia Smith delights in the education we provide here and the promise of justice it offers. May that spirit marvel at who we are now and revel in the individuals and community we are becoming," said Willie-LeBreton to conclude her inauguration speech. "And when in my dreams, Sophia whispers, 'What's it like?' I will answer her with joy and with pith, 'Oh Sophia, it's grand to be the president of Smith!'"



PHOTO BY BROOKE CHANDLER '25 COURTESY OF SMITH COLLEGE

President Sarah, as she is called by the student body, can often be seen walking around campus and is a frequent face at student events. "You have hugged me, high-fived me on Thursdays, fist bumped me on Fridays and saluted me on Saturdays," Willie-LeBreton said to students in her speech, thanking them for welcoming her into the Smith community. "You have shared ice cream, donuts and so many selfies [...] You have quite frankly overrun my office hours and challenged me to think with you on how to improve Smith. I am grateful for all of it. All of it."

Willie-LeBreton has been a hit with Smith students so far. "She seems really excited about actually doing stuff, and she's actually interested in talking to us," said Cameron Darling '25.

"I really like her," echoed Lentz. "I see her around campus and she waves to everyone.

She is present at events, and she wants to get to know everyone."

"She has a nice smile!" Romy Negrin '24 added.

Vanessa Nicole Silva-Burgos '24, president of the Student Government Association, expressed in her introductory remarks her feelings on the inauguration and what she hopes Willie-LeBreton will accomplish. "This year, in this moment, with President Willie-LeBreton's presence and leadership — I am inspired and full of hope to continue learning and practicing tenacity as we heal, build community and work towards a more just and equitable campus," she said.

Negrin summed it up neatly. "She's a net positive," she said. "It's going to be a good time."

Have You Met Webster?

BROOKE CHANDLER '25 Webster has lived
FEATURES EDITOR near Smith's campus
continued from page 1 since he was adopted

by Abuza and his late wife, Mardi '78. The couple began walking the campus following her diagnosis with a neurological condition that limited her mobility.

"[The Smith campus] is always clear in the wintertime, it's well lit, it's flat — she was safe," Abuza said. "She loved this campus and she loved seeing the students pester Webster."

Abuza believes Webster has met about half of the student body, if not more. On their walks, Abuza introduces Webster to students using a well-known phrase on campus: "Have you met Webster?"

"They come up and say, 'You know, he's the campus mascot,'" he said. "The most common refrain you ever get is 'Oh, I miss my dog.'"

Throughout Webster's time on the campus, he has formed special bonds with many students. Abuza told stories of students who would spend time with the dog on campus; some even shared how Webster had helped them through their most difficult times.

"It was the first week in September, and [a student] came up to me and said, 'Last May, during exams, I was really stressed out [...] but you and your wife came by and let me play with Webster, and you saved me,'" said Abuza.

"I started crying, [...] when I went home to tell my wife, she cried," he said. "I told our friend in counseling services and she said, 'Never underestimate the therapeutic power of animals.' That's why we like having Webster walk on campus."

The students weren't the only people who had grown to love the remedial presence of Webster. As Mardi's condition developed, he sat by her side and provided her with irreplaceable companionship.

"We're blessed to have a therapeutic dog," said Abuza. "He helped my wife all through her illness. She would go over to the sofa and pat him and just say, 'Oh Webster, I love you.'"

Smith alumnae who formed bonds with Webster during their time at Smith will pay him a visit when they return to campus. One alumna



PHOTO BY BROOKE CHANDLER '25

planned a reunion with Webster following her graduation and met Abuza and Mardi behind the Campus Center.

"She went ballistic, Webster went ballistic — it was great," Abuza said. "He has a fan club."

"I would say that Mardi and I were going to need therapists because it's terrible having a dog 10,000 times more popular than we'll ever be

in our lifetimes," he said.

Upperclassmen who have had the privilege of getting to know Webster throughout their years at college often hear a different phrase than the typical, "Have you met Webster?"

Webster greets them with a big, goofy smile and Abuza says, "Oh, I know you've met Webster."

Juliana Hatfield Wants You to Have a Little More Compassion for Yourself

OLIVIA PETTY '26

ARTS & CULTURE WRITER

The setup was intimate — two chairs positioned against the back wall of The Parlor Room, the slightly elevated stage adorned with a singular velvet curtain and a bright pink custom First Act Delia electric guitar propped off to the side. It's an unusually small space to be inhabited by a name such as Juliana Hatfield, the 90s alt-rock star known for her extensive solo career and former membership of The Lemonheads and Blake Babies.

At 56 years old, Hatfield has released 18 solo albums and has a 19th on the way, making the small stop in middle-of-nowhere Northampton, MA on Friday Oct. 13 seem all the more peculiar. But what was especially unusual about this show was the opener: not another musical artist, but a conversation between Hatfield and her longtime friend, former Blake Babies drummer Freda Love Smith.

Both hailing from the Boston area — Hatfield an alum of the Berklee College of Music — they sat down together onstage pre-show to discuss Love's new memoir "I Quit Everything." Love's book details her experiences overcoming alcoholism and addiction and her descent into the collegiate rock scene as a young adult.

"We're both in our 50s — can I say that? I just did," Hatfield said.

"It's true!" Love said. "And you know, no one ever talks about how great it is. Menopause is awesome."

The casual, friendly atmosphere of The Parlor Room allowed for a more frank conversation, one that, at times, might have divulged a little "too much information" according to Hatfield. Everything was fair game; from ex-boyfriends to joint pains, nothing was ever truly too much. Just for the night, in this room, shame took a backseat.

"There are a lot of things about this book that are the opposite of a self-help book," Love disclosed. "But, through it all, I gained the ability to really be with myself, which is powerful."

Being in-tune with oneself is a theme that comes up quite regularly throughout Hatfield's lengthy discography tracing all the way back to



PHOTO BY OLIVIA PETTY '26

the Blake Babies. Written off as "girlish" by music press for decades, her tour with Love by her side is a way of taking back control of her narrative. Formidable as she seems, her voice was soft as she flipped through a list of pre-written questions; the conversation with her old bandmate meandered in all directions.

"I have been intrigued by your temperance since 1986," Love commented, referencing Hatfield's longtime sobriety. But, Hatfield admitted that she had been dealing with a different kind of addiction.

"For decades I suffered from these eating disorders," Hatfield said. "Just like, binging and starving, binging and starving, back and forth [...] and it was hell. I never talked about it."

Hatfield has been open about her struggles with depression and disordered eating in the recent past, though the topic has become no less taboo over time.

"I think it's just my destiny to be kind of a lonely person in the world whose job is to make

music," Hatfield admitted. "During this little tour, playing my music, I really have been feeling intensely the sadness and loneliness of my songs, and they're the story of a sad and lonely life."

"But, loneliness drives the desire for connection, which can then drive the creative flow," Love pointed out.

She plays a generous set, pulling classics such as "My Sister," "Necessito" and "There's Always Another Girl," as well as more recent material and covers from artists including The Police and Olivia Newton John. At one point mid-set, Love slipped out from backstage to videotape Hatfield's performance of "I Don't Know What To Do With My Hands."

There is a pull and push of happy-sad, Hatfield's lyrics piecing together a clear narrative of solitude, and yet — the joyous presence of Love, the comradeship between them and the notion of endurance.

"What piece of advice would you give the younger versions of yourself when you were going through those hard addictive phases?" an audience member asked during the open Q&A section, a question for which both Hatfield and Love had to take a moment of silence.

"I think... just, have a little more compassion for yourself," Hatfield said. "I would try to say to myself: it's not your fault. You should have compassion for yourself."

"I'd like to tell my younger self that she doesn't have anything to prove," Love said. "There's this thing when you're young where you think everyone else has it really together — everyone else doesn't have it together. Literally no one does."

"And the people who seem like they do actually have it the least together," Hatfield added. "They're pretending."

At the end of the night, Hatfield concluded her set with a heart-wrenching performance of "Forever" from her 2004 album "In Exile Deo."

"Just one more then I'll quit / Forever / Forever / Forever and ever / Amen."

These Don't Have to Be the 'Best Years of Your Life'

PHOEBE RAK '24
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Before going to college, many I knew who had already been to college told me that these years would be the best of my life. Going in, I knew this was not guaranteed, but after COVID-19 canceled my senior year of high school, I was ready to embark on the next leg of my journey and finally experience this pivotal part of young adulthood I had heard so much about.

However exciting or empowering this “best years of your life” statement was supposed to be, my inherently anxious brain immediately turned making the most of my college experience into a task I had to complete. The frustrating reality of losing a precious year of my “best four years” to the pandemic only made me more determined to make the next three really count.

On social media, I constantly see posts of others' college experiences and hear stories of

my parents' and family friends' college experiences unmarred by COVID-19. I see posts and hear stories warning me to soak it up now, because “I will never get to live carefree with all of my best friends again.” This sentiment does not encourage growth; instead, it creates fear about graduating and what comes next.

But, most of all, I am scared for this time in my life to end. I am not ready to take on the burdens of financial stress, career stress and all the other stressors that come with “adulting.”

The idea that your college years are the best of your life also comes with the assumption that after peaking at 22, the rest of your life is downhill from there, which is incredibly discouraging and deeply untrue.

We need to dismantle and reshape this messaging. Your college years are supposed to be a period of growth, and I have had a wonder-

ful past three years at Smith. Was it everything I expected it to be when I imagined college as a child? Of course not. Has it been an impactful experience from which I have learned tremendously? Absolutely. I have had incredible classes where I have learned invaluable information and I have met wonderful friends with whom I hope to have lifelong bonds.

While I have had a positive college experience, I hope that these will not be the best years of my life. I hope to get to “live carefree with all of my best friends” post-graduation, and maybe after that, my priorities and goals will change, as they tend to do. Or maybe not; Monica and Rachel lived together for ten years, right?

Either way, perhaps by removing the label and its associated pressure of the “best years of my life,” I will be able to better enjoy this unique time without feeling the need to make the most out of every second until the clock runs out and it's all downhill.

I don't know what the solution is. This sounds cliché, but perhaps we should simply try to live in the moment. I am trying to learn how to do this myself. Worrying that my college experience is going to end without me having accomplished everything I arbitrarily think I “should” have done has a paradoxical effect; it turns care-free years into stressful ones.

I recently put up a message for myself on my door that says, “You have time.” It feels a little silly (I am not usually an affirmation post-notes person, though I aspire to be), but it is a good reminder to myself to slow down and enjoy it. Maybe that is an oversimplification, but perhaps it will help me.

I hope to look back at my time at Smith not as the best years of my life, but as fun, formative years which will give me the needed tools for the next step in my life. I will use the skills I learned for even more formative years post-graduation — I have time. And who knows, maybe I will “live carefree with all of my best friends” in a senior living facility one day.

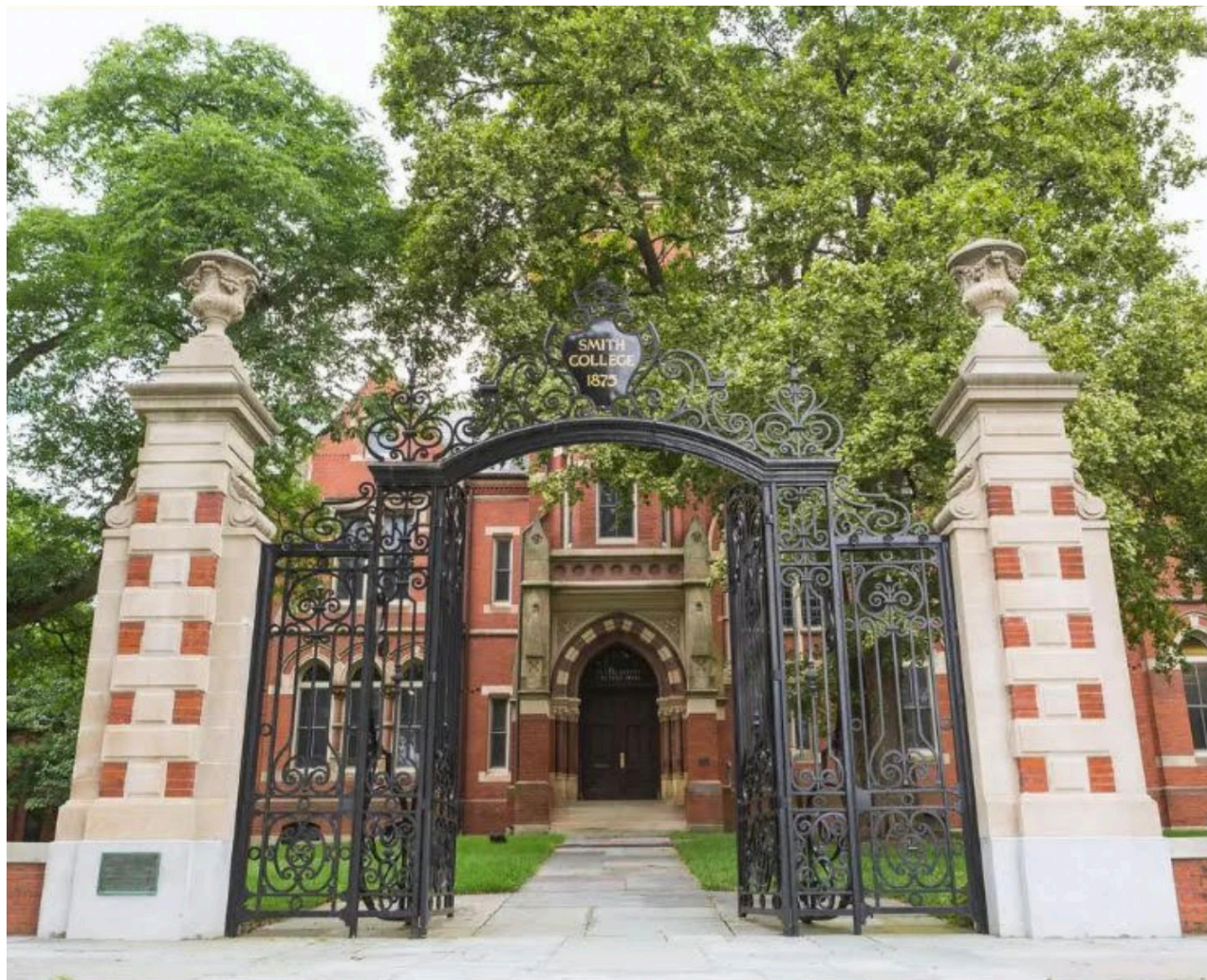


PHOTO COURTESY OF SMITH COLLEGE

Campus Safety Rolls Back Non-Emergency Rides

LEAH VERESS '25

SPORTS & WELLNESS WRITER

As Smith students

flooded back to campus for the fall semester, they were met with an email from Campus Safety notifying them of a policy change regarding non-emergency transportation. The email stated that Campus Safety would no longer be offering non-emergency rides, but would continue to provide students with emergency rides to the Schacht Center, Cooley Dickinson Hospital and Baystate Convenient Care. For many, the policy change came as an unwelcome surprise.

"It's upsetting," said Fiona Park '26 who attends routine medical appointments at both Cooley Dickinson and a doctor's office in Florence. "I'm thankful that I can still get a trip into Cooley Dickinson but for the other stuff, it's tough."

Park is one of hundreds of students who benefited from the Campus Safety non-emergency transportation services, which offered rides to scheduled doctors and dentist appointments, transit stations and pharmacies.

Interim Campus Safety Director Jeremy Kenneson acknowledged the inconvenience the policy change will pose to students, but explained that the decision to roll back non-emergency rides was made out of necessity.

"Campus Safety staffing could not continue to support non-emergency transports without negatively impacting emergency transports," he wrote in an email to The Sophian.

While the non-emergency rides have been offered for as long as most current students can remember, they were not always a part of the services offered by Campus Safety. Like many aspects of campus life, the rise of non-emergency Campus Safety rides can be traced back to the COVID-19 pandemic.

With the pandemic came fewer students on campus and reduced transit options. These factors prompted Campus Safety to extend their services to include some non-emergency rides. This expansion included most of the non-emergency transportation services many Smithies enjoyed until this fall.

However, as the initial impact of the

pandemic began to subside, the full student body returned to campus and the volume of requests for non-emergency Campus Safety rides increased significantly. By spring 2023, Kenneson explained that the strain non-emergency rides were putting on Campus Safety had grown too severe to be ignored.

During the summer of 2023, Kenneson approached Jim Gray, the associate vice president for facilities and operations, and Julianne Ohotnicky, the associate dean of the college and dean of students about returning to the pre-pandemic Campus Safety transportation policy. The decision to revert the policy was finalized in late summer and shortly after students received emails notifying them of the changes.

"We hope students will understand our focus on emergency services and overall campus safety," Kenneson wrote to The Sophian.

Upon receiving news of the policy change, many Smithies were alarmed by the apparent accessibility barrier it would create.

"Campo's [Campus Safety's] prioritization of emergency situations makes sense," Vivian Pittard '26 said. "But I still believe there needs to be a campus resource that helps people get to their doctors appointments for free."

The Smith College Campus Safety website provides students with a list of alternative transportation methods for non-emergent health-care appointments. These include Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVRTA) bus public transport system, free for Five College students during the academic year to certain locations and the Access Van which offers Office of Disability students rides to a wider range of destinations when drivers are available. Other suggested transportation methods cost students out-of-pocket fees and include renting a Zipcar, calling an Uber or Lyft, utilizing the paid PVRTA bus system or calling a different taxi service.

Despite the seemingly abundant list of alternatives, many Smithies are still struggling to secure dependable transportation.

"Not having a consistent transportation source can be tough, especially for people that don't have cars," Park said. "There are no Ubers in the area. I had to walk 35 minutes back [from an appointment] because I couldn't get a ride." While frustration has been expressed about the non-emergency ride suspension, students are voicing a desire for the creation of another campus resource that can fill the hole left by the Campus Safety rides.



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