

# THE SOPHIAN

## Road to the NCAA Championship: Volleyball's Strong Start and the Journey Ahead

**HILLARY CONNOR '26**  
SPORTS & WELLNESS EDITOR

The Smith College volleyball team has had the best start to their season since 2005, winning 10 out of 11 games so far and sweeping six of them. In the opening weekend at the Elmira Invitational alone, the team clocked 103 assists, 22 digs and 13 kills.

They received national recognition as the leaders in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) for Division III hitting percentage. Graduate transfer Taylor Gwynne, the team's new setter, gained the team

regional recognition for being named New England Women's and Men's Athletic Conference (NEWMAC) Offensive Player of the Week for the week of Sept. 1.

Captain and outside hitter Ari Cross '25 attributed the team's early success to the team building work of last semester and curating clear values during preseason this year. Fostering a tight-knit community is a major priority for them in order to build strong relationships both on and off the court, said Cross.

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## Taste of Northampton Brings Life Back to Main Street

**DELLA BAER '28**  
FEATURES WRITER

As the sun shone down in the early afternoon on Sept. 14, Northampton's Main Street bustled with crowds of smiling people. Live music echoed through the street, the smell of food filling the air. For the third year in a row, the Downtown Northampton Association (DNA) hosted the Taste of Northampton festival — an event designed for local restaurants and businesses to present select products to the community.

The festival, which ran from 12:00 to 8:00 p.m., featured more than 25 booths, including Woodstar Cafe, High Brow, Progression Brewing Company, Tandem Bagels, Masa Mexicano and Herrell's Ice Cream. Ali Garcia-Pollis '27 stumbled across the festival by mistake.

"It's our friend's birthday so we came down to get Herrell's but then this was, like, a lovely surprise," she said. "There are a lot of restaurants. I was expecting more of a fair situation like with fried dough and stuff but this is nice."

For Kendra Oberg '26, who was in line for mocktails from Eastside Grille's booth, the festival was not a surprise. "We usually go every year so it's just kind of like a tradition at this point [...] I feel like it's a good thing like in the first couple weeks of getting back to

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**Across:**

- 1. Post finals emotional reaction
- 4. \_\_\_ceratops
- 5. 19 of these on an acoustic guitar
- 7. “Fee \_\_\_ Fo Fum”
- 8. Endzone goal abbreviation
- 9. Covent of children of early 2000s film
- 11. Unit of corn
- 12. Texting as referred to 20 years ago

**Down:**

- 1. Seven nation army singers, the White \_\_\_
- 2. Minecraft lapis lazuli, e.g.
- 3. Non-alcoholic drink flavors
- 5. “Are you kidding me?” Expletive abbreviation
- 6. Common empirical double major with sociology
- 10. “I think therefore \_\_\_”

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Editorial Statement

Dear Readers:

Welcome back! We are so excited to present you with our first print edition of the 2024-25 academic year. After a long summer break, we have been eager to return to Smith and to The Sophian and to begin another semester of delivering you news from the Smith College community.

First, we, Isabel and Brooke '25, would like to reintroduce ourselves as the leaders of our publication. We have both worked in a variety of roles on The Sophian and are proud to be heading the newspaper this year. We are honored and humbled by the responsibility we bear to continue to foster a productive and critical discourse within the larger community.

This year, we will be continuing our print subscription program and hope that this service will help The Sophian reach more readers beyond our campus. Additionally, it is our hope that our ongoing collaboration with

the Jacobson Center will help us expand into other forms of journalism — podcasting, photojournalism, videography, comics and other multimedia. We have already received a great deal of interest from new students, and we are excited to incorporate new ideas and perspectives into our newspaper.

After three very different years at Smith, returning to campus as a senior for our final year has felt bittersweet. Nevertheless, we are proud of the work we have done on The Sophian so far and are ready for more.

We are incredibly grateful for our readership — both on campus and around the world.

With gratitude,

Isabel Birge '25, Editor-in-Chief  
Brooke Chandler '25, Managing Editor



# Taste of Northampton Brings Life Back to Main Street

DELLA BAER '28  
FEATURES WRITER

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sort of just connect

with the Northampton community outside of other Smithies," she said.

Taste of Northampton was first held in the 1990s before it stopped in 2004. The festival was an offshoot of a larger series of "Taste" festivals originating with "Taste of Chicago" created by restaurateur Arnie Morton in 1980. Springfield, Westfield and Holyoke also held taste festivals during the 80s and 90s. Eventually, the festivals, which were then four day events, began to face challenges and dipped in popularity. It was difficult to organize outdoor venues big enough to hold the event, in addition to the fact that they were dependent on the weather. Restaurants also became less interested in participating as some did not want to lose valuable staff members to the festival on weekends, and participating in the festival often resulted in high expenses that did not always translate to profit.

The DNA brought the festival back in 2022 with the help of a grant from the Massachusetts Regional Economic Development Organization following the end of COVID-19 shut downs in an effort to uplift local businesses and the community. In 2023, the festival drew approximately 12,000 people.

Stacia Potter, the owner of Flowerwork Farm, noted the festival's positive impact on her business, which sells sustainable floral arrangements at a seasonal farmstand in Florence. "This is our third year here and it's been great [...] I really like connecting with people. Last year I met a bride and then they hired me to do the wedding so [the festival is] a really fun way to come out and meet people and tell them about what fresh flowers are like," Potter said.

At Taste of Northampton, Potter sells mini bouquets in small glass vases, which she says are popular among Smith students. "I get a lot of Smith students who are like 'oh my god I want flowers in my room' and then the little vases are perfect because who brings a vase to college?" she said.

Deborah Moggio, who ran a booth for

Brits R U.S., explained how the festival helps spread the word about the shop. "[Taste of Northampton] lets people know as well, people are like 'where's your shop?'" Moggio said.

Beyond the opportunities Taste of Northampton brings to local business owners, it also showcases local artists through its set of live music presented by the Northampton Arts Council. Singer, songwriter and Northampton native Hannah Mohan performed with a band at the festival. Mohan recently released her first solo album, "Time Is A Walnut," following an eight-year-long career with the Indie-Pop band And The Kids.

During her set at Taste of Northampton, Mohan sang a cover of the song "Archie, Marry Me" by the band Alvays, during which a large crowd gathered and many sang along, some buying her merch after the fact. "I'm just feeling really good and in high spirits so it feels good to give that energy and get that energy," Mohan said after her show. Since launching her solo

career, Mohan has performed at various community events, where she says she encounters many familiar faces. "I think it's so fun [and] cool because I'll see people that I know and people that I don't or people that have seen me for years, it's just good to see people," she says. In addition to Mohan, artists Avery Joi, Mal Maiz and DJ REC performed throughout the festival.

For artists, business owners and residents alike Taste of Northampton has fostered an undeniable connection. Northampton residents Joe and Carla Ross spoke fondly of their first year at the festival. "It's wonderful to have it on a beautiful sunny day and just to see all the people out here and see their animals. We've bumped into neighbors and we've met other people from the area who have totally different lives," Carla Ross says. "It's nice to see the downtown area so lively, most of the time it's not like this or hasn't been since COVID-19," Joe Ross said. Taste of Northampton will return again in 2025.



PHOTO BY DELLA BAER '28



# Cushing/Emerson Dining Closure Brings Mixed Reactions to Campus

**JADA WORDLAW '26**  
NEWS WRITER

Smith College  
announced the

closing of Cushing/Emerson dining hall on April 25, 2024, effective in the 2024-25 academic year, which has led to dissatisfaction and complaints among students and staff. The decision resulted from a routine assessment in Dining Services that primarily focused on evaluating student dining experiences and usage levels.

The closing of Cushing/Emerson was part of a larger strategic mission influenced by the dining hall's performance, according to Andy Cox, Executive Director of Auxiliary Services and Patricia Hentz, Director of Residential Dining.

"In recent years, we noticed a decline in usage of Cushing/Emerson, which provided breakfast and dinner but didn't have a kitchen

that supported special dining needs," they said via email.

Currently, the college operates nine residential dining halls, with three located in the Quad. King/Scales continues to serve breakfast, lunch and dinner, with brunch on weekends, while Comstock and Haynes provide dinner Sunday through Thursday.

Some full-time dining staff members working in the Quad dining halls voiced frustration regarding how Dining Services has managed these recent changes.

"[The closure] has caused King to become very busy," said one employee, who will remain anonymous. "We run out of food and we run out of steam from all the running around we do [...] We just hear, 'you aren't that busy' or 'you made it through.' They expect us to feed the extra

students with no extra help."

Additionally, the menus and student traffic at Comstock and Haynes were described as "unsustainable" by another anonymous employee located at the Quad.

Dining Services highlighted their commitment to environmental sustainability, an essential factor in their decision to close Cushing/Emerson.

"[We] make every effort to ensure that we are good stewards of resources," said Cox and Hentz. "Shutting down walk-ins, cooking equipment and hood systems will reduce our carbon footprint and contribute to our campus environmental goals."

By shifting attention from Cushing/Emerson, the team said they have instead focused on improving other dining locations. This year, Comstock and Haynes have extended their hours to accommodate higher student traffic and existing menus have also been refined.

Comstock now exclusively serves Pan Asian cuisine, while Haynes continues to host a stir fry bar. One employee recalled the eight-hour shifts they experienced with no breaks during the beginning of the semester, working at the shared kitchen between Comstock and Haynes. They are now unable to cook for students who require specific dietary needs, a service they were able to provide at Cushing/Emerson.

Students have also expressed dissatisfaction with their dining experiences this fall, including longer lines and food shortages.

"They said that they were going to be opening more late night dining options and things like that, when they've actually shortened hours at the Campus Center," said a member of the United Smith Student Workers (USSW) who requested to remain anonymous. "It just seems like they're not taking any responsibility for the consequences of this decision."

Prior to Cushing/Emerson's closing, staff attempted to increase usage with menu changes by offering popular meals such as "breakfast for dinner," a dining employee said.



PHOTO BY NAOMI SCULLY-BRISTOL '25



He also noted that students were experiencing confusion regarding how to enter the Cushing side of the dining hall, a factor that heavily impacted Cushing/Emerson's usage. Staff asked for reconfigurations for the entire dining hall to be made more accessible, but these concerns were not answered.

Cox and Hentz told The Sophian that they have managed the reassignment process smoothly for both affected full-time staff and student employees. They encouraged students to pursue vacant job opportunities across campus.

The USSW member noted that student dining workers were informed of the closing through the all-student announcement on April 25. Full-time staff were notified 10 days earlier.

"We heard that we might be getting some news that might affect our jobs," they said. "But we didn't actually find out until everyone else did."

The student also mentioned the consistent need for student staff in dining locations. "They need coverage all the time, and they're basically begging people to show up," they said. "But it just doesn't work like that."

"I worked at [Cushing/Emerson], and now I have nowhere to work because it's the most accessible dining hall to me personally," said Augustina Alapa '26. "[Cushing/Emerson] for me was the most welcoming dining hall space to work at."

The USSW member reported that student dining shifts have become increasingly demanding. "If you're in King/Scales washing dishes during the weekend rushes where there used to be a whole other dining hall open, it's totally different now," they said.

Full-time dining staff also shared concerns about transparency and preparedness. "Many members will tell you that they are having a hard time keeping up with change and that management tells them to just give it a little more time," said one employee.

Another staff member noted growing discontent due to understaffing and student over-enrollment. "I will say that there has been a wave of unease that has become stronger than it even was during COVID," they said. "Staff members put up with so much during the height of the pandemic, and now we are being squeezed even more."

Some staff reported being forced to accept positions with lower skill requirements and pay due to Cushing/Emerson's closing, regardless of personal preference.

"I wasn't able to bid on a position as I always had in the past," one person said in an email to The Sophian. Job bidding is a process where a union employee can apply and transfer to another open position, if qualified. "I was FORCED to accept the new position that was created, which even if I had the opportunity I would have NEVER bid that position."

Another worker observed an increasing reliance on "floaters" to cover shifts at dinner times, showing concern for potential long wait times for students during colder months. Additionally, an employee who requires medical accommodations said that their needs were not considered in the reassignment process.



PHOTO BY NAOMI SCULLY-BRISTOL '25

"This certainly caused a ton of stress and nights of little sleep and worry," they said. "Something of which the individuals making these decisions I feel doesn't truly understand."

One dining employee also shared an appreciative perspective. "Smith College is an amazing place for a food service employee to work," he said. "We have rights that in an at will state like Massachusetts most people in this industry would never dream of."

"It doesn't mean that we deserve to get worked to the bone though," he continued. "One of Smith College's Core Values is that it strives to provide exemplary service and model leadership in its field. Our dining program should also represent that."

The employee also emphasized the impacts of these changes on students. He said the burden of Smith having to "make up shortfalls" has fallen on the students and can negatively affect their college experience if it continues.

In the past, Gillett dining hall was reopened after students took consistent action against the decision to close it, according to a staff member, who expressed hope that a similar outcome could be achieved again.

The Dining Services team invited students to engage with the strategic planning process, a community-based feedback approach described in President Sarah's most recent letter to the Smith community.

"Strategic planning will serve as a guide for the college community, including dining services," said Cox and Hentz. "By participating in the process you can make a lasting impact on life at Smith!"

Smith will host focus group conversations on Sept. 26 and 27. Virtual (suggestion-box@smith.edu) and physical suggestion boxes are also available to students on the first floor of the Campus Center near the café.

The closure of Cushing/Emerson was abrupt for many students who miss the dining hall and remember it fondly.

"It just felt like there was more community," said Abby Ball '26. Madina Tall '26 added, "It was nice kind of just joining other people's conversations, that forced proximity of a connection."

# BRAT Summer:

## A Review of Charli XCX's Latest Album

ARSHIE CHAUNDRY '27  
ASST. FEATURES EDITOR

Charli XCX has single-handedly rendered it impossible to associate the color neon green with anything other than her latest release, “BRAT.” Her sixth studio album, released on June 7, has received generous critical acclaim online, where fans have decided BRAT isn’t just an album, but a lifestyle — coining the term “BRAT” summer. “BRAT” delves into themes of insecurity, obsession, friendship and fame all while reeking of Parliament Lights, hard drugs and the dance floor of a strobe-lit nightclub — successfully illustrating an image of womanhood in the modern era.

*“The heart of ‘BRAT’ is its oscillation between gut-wrenching vulnerability and arrogant pretention.”*

Cambridge-born Charlotte Aitchison began releasing music in 2011 at the age of 19. Since then, the British musician has been a pioneer of hyperpop and experimentalism. After her big break “I Love It,” co-written with Icona Pop, she featured on Iggy Azalea’s 2014 Billboard No. 1 hit “Fancy.” More recently, her fifth album, “Crash,” a concept record about becoming a sell-out pop star, topped the charts, while her 2023 single “Speed Drive” was a highlight on the “Barbie” soundtrack.

The first track on BRAT, “360,” opens with her signature auto-tuned montone and bubbly beat — a fun yet digestible introduction to what Charli has to offer. Fan-favorite “Talk Talk,” tackles verbosity — language as a form of confession and means of communication. Lead single “Von Dutch,” produced by EasyFun, describes being an object of gossip or obsession

for people around you and embracing it. She sings in the infamous first line: “It’s alright to just admit that I’m your fantasy / you’re obsessing, just confess it ’cause it’s obvious,” further imbuing her brat persona. My personal favorites off the record are “Sympathy is a knife” and “B2b,” in which Charli bares some of her most conflicted emotions over an addictive beat and playful production.

In an interview with “The Face,” Charli said, “I kinda miss the time when pop music was really volatile and crazy. I miss the Paris Hilton days. Everybody is so worried about everything right now, how they’re perceived, if this art they’ve created is going to offend anyone. It limits creative output to think like that.”

“Girl, so confusing” offers a refreshing outlook on womanhood. Charli admitted to comparing herself to Lorde, another alternative-pop artist operating at the same time and in the same spaces as Charli. “She had big hair; I had big hair,” she said in an interview with “Rolling Stone.” The song interrogates how gendered comparison and jealousy can hinder growth and potential. “It’s so confusing sometimes to be a girl,” she states plainly. The lyrics are as clunky as they are earnest. It’s raw and unfinished, but she wants us

to know that’s intentional on her part.

The songwriting makes some of the tracks underwhelming. I cannot see myself returning to “Rewind,” in which Charli finds herself pining for simpler days when she didn’t worry about her appearance or chart placement, but ultimately feels like a weaker reinterpretation of her 2018 hit “1999.” It is clear to me how tracks like these are intended to be part of the emotional core that elevates this album past generic pop, but the lyrics read as plainly as a diary entry, making it difficult to resonate with. Similarly, the awkward lyricism of “Mean girls” might have been saved by a catchy beat, but was not.

“BRAT” concludes with an amalgamation of the entire album, “365,” accompanying us through all the emotions of a night out — excitement, euphoria, instability and most importantly, dance! “BRAT” successfully captures a universal feeling in our cultural climate: partying as a means to veil feelings of the world around you. But sometimes following these moments of existentialism you just have to say “f\*ck it,” as exemplified by “365.”

The heart of “BRAT” is its oscillation between gut-wrenching vulnerability and arrogant pretention. “BRAT”’s addition to VP Kamala Harris’s presidential campaign raises questions about the politics of pop music, highlighting music’s role in enacting social change and also how important it is to recognize the power young people have in our democracy.

“I get tired of behaving in a way that people expect me, or expect pop stars, to behave. I’m not a role model — and I never did this because I wanted to be.” Charli XCX said to “The Face.” “But I understand it comes with the territory. I am a role model for a very flawed, genuinely real, non-perfect person. And that’s all I would ever want to be.”

This is the energy — defiant, empowering and of course, bratty — that runs throughout the backbone of this body of work.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHARLI XCX



# Road to the NCAA Championship: Volleyball's Strong Start and the Journey Ahead

**HILLARY CONNOR '26** Co-captain and  
SPORTS & WELLNESS EDITOR defensive special-  
*continued from page 1* ist Olivia Smith  
'25 agreed. "Since we've been freshmen, a big challenge that's faced our program is building the type of culture that we want to have because we inherited a team that didn't have a concrete team culture," Smith said.

"Last year, we did a lot of work to make sure that [graduating] class divides were as small as possible and that the team culture stood for what we wanted it to. Having that solid foundation that we've been working to build for the past three years and adding in two new players that have been very well aligned to our mission has all contributed to what we see now," said Smith.

One of the team's core philosophies is accepting and celebrating differences. Gwynne said the team's welcoming environment is one of the main reasons why she loved joining Smith this year.

"Being new on the team, I have felt appreciation for all the uniqueness and differences that every person brings," she said. "Everyone feels so comfortable being themselves that it makes me feel comfortable being myself."

Gwynne previously played volleyball at Oberlin College during her undergraduate career. She remarked that joining the Smith team introduced her to an entirely new level of play.

"It's a pretty big team for Division III," Gwynne said, "but that means it's always competitive. There's always competition at practices, people competing for spots, but also just the energy in the gym is always very competitive and at a high level. I think the biggest difference is honestly the level of play of our own team and the teams that we play. There's a lot of coaches here, and at Oberlin, we didn't have the resources for that. Here, in the gym, we consistently have four to five coaches and so constantly getting that feedback individually has helped me become better already."

The team has improved this year, but the players agreed that it has not been an easy road. However, Smith said the team feels "united by

the challenge of the season." Cross added that the increased team chemistry and community they have been building has led to the collective engagement and commitment which has driven the team forward thus far.

"We have morning practices, we have 6 a.m. lifts, which is hard," Cross said, "but when you're able to go through that [...] together as a team, and you recognize that you're not doing it for yourself but that you're doing it for other people, I think that makes it much easier."

On objectives for the rest of the season, all three players agreed that winning the conference championship is the ultimate goal.

"We want to win NEWMACs, 1,000 percent," Cross said. "That's been a goal for us pretty much since we got here as first-years, and I think that a large part of that is being proactive in the beginning of the season, making sure we know that is our collective goal, having a light at the end of the tunnel is what makes it all worth it and what gets us up in the morning."

***"We want to win NEWMACs, 1,000 percent," Cross said. "That's been a goal for us pretty much since we got here as first-years, and I think that a large part of that is being proactive in the beginning of the season"***

"It is definitely tough when you hit mid-October and you still have two to three weeks left in the season," said Smith. "It's really hard to find that motivation to just keep going, keep being competitive."

She added that the coaches help keep them moving forward by focusing on specific

teams they will face and what the opposing team will target, so they have concrete goals to work towards for the remainder of the season.

"We have practices where they're replicating what the other team is going to do," Smith said. "Always having something you're looking forward to and something you're preparing for just helps keep the energy going so you always feel like there's a purpose behind what you're doing."

Gwynne remarked that the team's commitment helps them keep their momentum going as the season continues.

"We're really lucky because everybody wants to be here, and you don't have to be here," she said. "In the gym, it is clear everyone is giving effort. Everybody wants to be on the team, everybody wants to earn their spot and everybody shows up every morning and whether you're at 20 percent for your day or 100 percent for your day, you're giving what you have."

"You know that you're not going through it alone," Smith adds. "We're playing for each other, not against each other every day."

Smith said the team is in a unique position to strive for a conference championship this year because they have a majority of upperclassmen, with eight players who are in their final year.

"All eight of us want to win NEWMACs, all eight of us want to qualify for the NCAs and we have an entire team backing us in that mission and that goal," she said. "It's a different experience this year having that motivation."

Gwynne said that while their ultimate goal is winning NEWMACs and qualifying for the national tournament, the team also values the journey to those goals.

"One of our team values is enjoyment and I think we would all enjoy winning, but there's different ways to find enjoyment and throughout the pursuit of all these goals," Gwynne said.

The team's next home game will be on Oct. 1 at 7:00 p.m. in Ainsworth Gymnasium against NEWMAC competitor Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI).

# The Case Against Consulting Firms on College Campuses

**KAREN COLMÁN MARTÍNEZ '26** At the end of last year's

OPINIONS EDITOR faculty budget presentation — featuring a meticulously crafted slide deck full of data, graphs and figures — a microphone was passed along to faculty members for a brief question-and-answer session. Concerns ranged from the need for more academic support positions such as Teaching Assistants to those about the tenure cap and administrative bloat. Almost all inquiries were addressed by VP of Finance David DeSwert, whose catch-all response was something along how we are “moving along according to our strategic planning.”

Strategic planning has been a cornerstone of American higher education for the past thirty to forty years. Strategic planning, initially known as strategic management, emerged after World War II as businesses aimed to adapt the military strategies that had proven successful during the war to the corporate sector. You analyze your strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats — this is called a SWOT analysis, by the way — and you get rid of the strengths and weaknesses and take advantage of your strengths and opportunities. This is typically the kind of work done by a consulting firm, which they then nicely package into a PowerPoint slide deck.

Recently, President Sarah Willie-LeBreton sent a campus-wide email inviting the student body to participate in “join [them] in Strategic Planning discussions.” This process involves Smith's planning partner Wellspring Consulting, a consulting firm hired to assist in decision-making. Because, of course, who could understand the needs of a liberal arts college better than a consulting firm?

What has the consultocracy — a system where decisions, policies or significant aspects of management are heavily influenced by external consultants — done for American higher education? D'Youville University is a private university founded in 1908 in Buffalo, New York. Here, you can no longer major in English, history, philosophy and religious studies

following the school's administration's decision to hire Gray Associates, a consulting firm specialized in helping cash-strapped schools make “data-informed program decisions.” Students at D'Youville reported that “the consultants were on campus for a month or two [...] they talked about the university portfolio as if they were talking about stocks. They also did what they call a market analysis of different majors.”

Last year, West Virginia University (WVU) announced a plan to eliminate 9 percent of their majors, all of its foreign language programs and 16 percent of its full time faculty members. This decision was also followed by WVU's administration's decision to hire rpk GROUP, a consulting firm with “significant experience and expertise in higher education transformation and academic portfolio optimization.” Even more recently, WVU decided to eliminate other programs that include math, literature, linguistics, jazz, ceramics and creative writing. WVU is now deeply in debt and under the sway of market-obsessed consultants.

*“The role of faculty governance and student input, once pillars of decision-making at higher education institutions, is increasingly being sidelined in favor of outside expertise.”*

Both of the colleges cited above who were experiencing significant budget cuts were indeed cash-strapped. However, Smith has a \$2.1 billion endowment — enough to sustain itself for a long time. Yet, the administration's strategic planning efforts have already resulted in decisions like cutting funding for humanities research labs and closing the Cushing/Emerson dining hall.

Faculty and students alike have noticed that these administrative decisions often seem to mirror the kinds of recommendations one would

expect from a corporate consultancy: cut “inefficient” programs, streamline operations, reduce expenses and focus on metrics like student demand or market potential. But education isn't a business, and the value of the programs and services the student body needs can't be measured solely by the numbers on a spreadsheet.

*“What's lost in this pursuit of “efficiency” and “optimization” is the core value of a liberal arts education: the fostering of critical thinking, creativity and intellectual curiosity. These qualities cannot be reduced to market trends or job placement statistics.”*

The creeping influence of consultants in higher education signals a worrying trend. The role of faculty governance and student input, once pillars of decision-making at higher education institutions, is increasingly being sidelined in favor of outside expertise. Strategic planning efforts and committees, with their data-driven, one-size-fits-all approach, reduce the unique challenges and values of an academic institution into something that resembles a corporate balance sheet.

What's lost in this pursuit of “efficiency” and “optimization” is the core value of a liberal arts education: the fostering of critical thinking, creativity and intellectual curiosity. These qualities cannot be reduced to market trends or job placement statistics. They are essential to the mission of higher education, especially at an institution like Smith, which prides itself on nurturing independent thinkers and leaders. Smith must decide whether to remain a place of intellectual growth and innovation or succumb to the pressures of a corporate mindset that devalues the very essence of higher education.