

Todd Selig

28 May 2020

Dear Todd,

I am writing to express my growing alarm at how the Durham Town Government is treating both its citizens and particularly with how it seems hell bent on allowing the downtown to become a student ghetto at a time when enrollment projections for UNH are certain to decline, even before the coming cliff.

When Annmarie and I arrived in Durham in August, 1969 to begin a long career at UNH, the university was just beginning an expansion from around 5,000 to 10,000 students and the deans that I talked to at my interview were expressly interested in increasing the focus on research and graduate education. At the same time, New Hampshire was 50th in the nation in support for public education and that has not changed.

Durham was special because people were willing to pay extra high property taxes so their children could attend good schools. Now the university brags about being a major research university, but the dirty little secret is that the budget for the College of Life Sciences and Agriculture (COLSA) is funded by over 90% undergraduate tuition. For years the rumor mill on campus has included plans by the university to grow to 20,000 students, often denied but always enrollments kept inching upwards and, by my own experience, admission standards declined.

This last academic year, only COLSA maintained its admission levels, while the University suffered a 9 % decline in enrollment. For six years, ending three years ago, I was Chair of Biological Sciences and almost every year during that time, a representative from the administration would come to our Executive Committee meetings and talk about how the demographics were going to be declining in numbers of applicants and how we needed to do our best to maintain enrollments. When 90% of your budget is undergraduate tuition that is serious.

Another hat I have worn for many years is the coordinator of the Marine, Estuarine and Freshwater Biology (MEFB) major and am a primary go to person for Admissions who ask me to meet with visiting prospective students and their parent(s) for the mostly marine biology major. I also represent the MEFB Major at the open houses for prospective and admitted students so I have done more than my share to sell UNH. When you combine the current pandemic and online teaching (this was my last semester after 51 years), combined with the very real projected declines in prospective student numbers, UNH is likely in for a very serious enrollment crisis. Right now, the major issue of the recent faculty meetings (I attended by zoom my last meeting yesterday) is how to deal with teaching students in the hands on laboratory-oriented courses the sciences require (= online and parents and students will not come for that).

One another side note. I spent some research time a number of years ago at the University of California, Santa Barbara (a serious research university where faculty hide from undergraduates). Nearby was the community of Chula Vista. Chula Vista is a full-blown student ghetto where there were very few families and mostly slum lords exploiting students. Increasingly, my sense of the development projects in Durham remind me of Chula Vista. It does not have to be this way, but the way the Town is dealing with the Mill Plaza proposal, especially with Taintor and Souter who are not representative of town interests, to facilitate a

bad outcome rather than working for the interests of the resident community is extremely troubling. Add a Planning Board that does not seem to care about anything but more development when the facts and resident community say no.

We all want a downtown, including a renovated and attractive Plaza, that supports its resident community and not just students, but we seem to be on the path not taken into the downward spiral of cultural and economic decline. How can you be a magnet to young families when you are increasingly assumed to be a student ghetto?

Sorry to vent at you. I know you want the best for Durham and right now I see nothing but negatives and conflict, including potential legal challenges.

All the best, Larry