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## Renegade Trustees at Dartmouth

At many colleges that allow alumni to elect some trustees, the races aren't exactly exciting. An alumni committee typically nominates a slate of candidates who have worked their way up through the ranks, they issue statements about how wonderful the college president is, some number are elected and most people don't ever notice.

At Dartmouth College this year, things did not go according to that plan. Two alumni who have been highly critical of some of the college's decisions gathered petitions to get on the ballot against four others who had been nominated by an alumni committee. And when the results were announced Wednesday, the two renegade candidates — both of whom questioned the direction of the college — were the victors.

[Peter Robinson](#), one of the victors, is a fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. His platform called for promoting free speech on campus, keeping faculty members focused on teaching rather than research, improving an athletic program that he said was "sunk in mediocrity," and ending programs that require fraternity members to attend "inclusivity" seminars. A former speechwriter for President Reagan, Robinson wrote to alumni: "After watching the fortieth chief executive of the United States stand up to the Kremlin, I'd be perfectly happy to stand up to the bureaucracy in Hanover."

[Todd J. Zywicki](#), the other victor, is a law professor at George Mason University. In his platform, he said that the college's leaders had turned away from the "great legacy" of the institution. "The administration has enlarged class sizes, starved the athletic program, and attacked the sororities and fraternities," he said, pledging to work to reverse all of those directions.

The two new trustees may have won one policy battle already. The college this month altered its [policies](#) on free speech in a way that pleased both Robinson and Zywicki — although both said that they believed the college needed to do even more to promote free expression on its campus.

Experts on trustees had different views on the election. Richard T. Ingram, president of the Association of Governing Boards of Colleges and Universities, said that it was "very unusual" for candidates to win these elections without backing from official alumni groups. Ingram — who stressed that he didn't have an opinion on the Dartmouth trustees, but was discussing these kinds of trustee candidates generally — said an election like this one "can be a healthy construct as long as people remember the fundamentals."

"When you find yourself on the board, you need to do what's best for the institution, not carry out a personal agenda," Ingram said. That can be hard for candidates who have won election on a specific platform. "We need more active trustees, but not more trustee activism," he said.

Ingram added that the new trustees "may find the experience frustrating." While many imagine a trustee having great power over a college, he said, "no single trustee has much authority."

Anne D. Neal, president of the American Council of Trustees & Alumni, was thrilled when told of the election results. The council is a group that encourages trustees and alumni to push for a more rigorous curriculum and against what it sees as political correctness at many colleges.

"Alums have had enough," Neal said. "They are part of a growing cadre of alumni who understand that they need to step up to the plate. The 'go along, get along' approach isn't the way you keep colleges financially healthy and academically healthy."

— [Scott Jaschik](#)