

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

June 24, 2023



Hello Amazing Alums!

Welcome all to the Alumnae Association of Mills College's Annual Meeting for the 2022-2023 term. I write today to give a brief summary of the journey that myself, the Board of Governors, and the AAMC committees have experienced during our first year of transition from Mills College, a women's liberal arts college, to Mills College at Northeastern, a large, co-ed business-oriented university.

Let's not kid ourselves, it's been a rewarding but also very difficult year. But let's look at the positives we see today. Look at us. We are hundreds strong, zooming in from all parts of the US and abroad, to remotely attend the Annual Meeting of the Alumnae Association of Mills College. We represent classes from the 1950's to 2023, a 73 year span, all here today.

An outsider might ask, what possibly could these participants have in common? To want to give up their Saturday for a two hour meeting? I think we all know the answer. We are Mills. This College shaped us as to who we would become. Our lives were changed for the better, in more ways than we ever expected. And through the many individual journeys taken, the appreciation and loyalty to Mills has stayed constant.

We're here today to review the year and to VOTE to choose a slate of new AAMC leaders - 1 VP, 4 Governors and 6 Nominating Committee members. It's a complicated election, so pay particular attention to the election procedures that will be outlined shortly - and hang on for the ride.

But before we take off, there are thank yous to be expressed.

Thanks to you. Your support of the AAMC, as exemplified here today with your attendance, is greatly appreciated, as your Board of Governors has sought to steady the course and stay focused on what we know best – working with and honoring Alums and keeping our presence on this campus for students and alums alike.

Thanks to our three outstanding alums who were honored during Reunion in October for their sterling service. Yvonne Payne Daniel, MA '75 was honored with the AAMC Distinguished Alum award. Bonnie Reuter Leaver '58 was celebrated, receiving the Outstanding Volunteer award. And Shay Franco-Clausen '22 was presented with the Recent Graduate Award. All are shining examples of the enduring strengths of our cross generational alumnae. Nominations are being accepted now to honor the 2023 AAMC Award recipients at the upcoming Reunion. Send in your candidates to info@aamc-mills.org!

Thanks and commendations to the Board of Governors team for their dedication, their willingness to tackle controversies, and deal with the unforeseen issues that surfaced constantly. To the Governors who have completed their terms, your experience has been invaluable. Thanks and best wishes to Vice President Pam Roper '92, Treasurer Christina Hannan '91, Catherine Ladnier '70, Ellen Hines '74, Mitra Lobrasb '90, and Ariadne Wolf, MFA '19, two of whom are on the slate for re-election today.

Thanks also to two Governors, Debra Connick '85, who worked so hard to put on last year's election, as well as Cherlene Sprague Wright '92, who departed earlier this year. The nominating committee has appointed Maria Dominguez '08 and Julia Almanzan '92 to fill their remaining one year terms. Welcome Julia and Maria!

Thanks to Governor Kieran Turan '90, who with help from dedicated governors has worked literally 24-7 to prepare for this unprecedented AAMC Annual meeting on zoom, with multiple positions to be elected, with all of you participating, and according to our Bylaws. As they say it takes a village, and Kieran has certainly been the mayor of our village. Thank you Kieran. As many of you are aware, planning for this multi-ballot zoom annual meeting has required continual reference to the current Bylaws. There have been many unknowns here, and many basic questions asked both by the governors and the membership. We have sought legal interpretations constantly to explain and confirm the intricacies of bylaws written in 2013 that we are legally bound to uphold as a 501-C3.

There is good news here too. A Bylaws Committee headed by Vice President Kathy Roskos '80 and Governance Chair Alice Hewitt '15 has worked tirelessly on revising the Bylaws, to bring them up to current California Corporations Code with new policies and procedures. Going through this current election process has been a good test for additional bylaw changes that can be made to clarify the process we have embarked upon today. It is the goal that new Bylaws will go forward for a vote by the membership at the conclusion of the '23-'24 term.

So let's look at our 2022-23 AAMC term. Why was it so challenging? Well for all of us here, shall we look in the mirror? Our reflections are so different. The personal trauma and grief that many alums have experienced these past 2 years, from the announcement of the closure of Mills College to the reality of the merger, is not to be underestimated. And then there are those who may have welcomed the change from the very start.

Where are you in this transition? I can assure you that in trying to represent alums, your Governors have felt, dealt with, and promoted many if not all of these conflicting and sometimes unspoken positions. But despite many differing opinions, the Governors realized that how we played the cards that we were dealt this year could affect the very roots of the AAMC.

We didn't have the answers, but we asked you for yours in our Options Proposal in January and February of this year. We learned like in life, the answers are often more varied than the questions posed. The 544 alums who responded, many who are here today, had guarded responses, posing questions to answers that were not there.

Determining Reinhardt's future, our home on the Mills campus, was the most often expressed concern. Other key questions were how the storied history and legacy of Mills would continue, to the uncertain future of the liberal arts curriculum, for the Music, Dance and Art programs that had put Mills on the national stage.

And how would Mills' long established focus on social justice grow and flourish? To ensure that Mills College at Northeastern would support a diverse student body representing and championing students of color, of different gender persuasions, first gen students, diverse international students, and resumers? Where would they fit in with this new and unknown large university?

And the bottom line from our surveys was this question, “How can we vote on the AAMC’s future when we don’t know details and have few answers of what is to come?”

Given this new reality, the Board voted to delay any formal Options vote in order to try to answer these monumental questions. If you have read the President’s Message in the Fall and Winter Mills Quarterly, you are familiar with this saga, but for all I think it is worth repeating the benchmarks of our journey.

Throughout the spring, your President and our two Vice Presidents, Dr. Pam Roper and Kathy Roskos, met with key Northeastern administrators. Without exception, these University leaders espoused their support for the AAMC, their willingness to work with us, and the desire that the AAMC grow with them in mentoring students and offering new opportunities for alums.

We met with Beth Kochly, former Mills Chemistry professor and department head, who is now dean of Mills College of Northeastern, to ask about alums academic and liberal arts concerns. It was reassuring that with Dr Kochly’s leadership, Mills professors are developing curriculum and courses to support the liberal arts and the academic focus of the Mills we know. And the roll out of the Mills College at Northeastern 4-year degree granting curriculum is scheduled for 2025.

So you might ask, what is the most important takeaway the officers and your Board have learned from these conversations?

First, Beth Hilman’s statement that our use of Reinhardt Alumnae House was only guaranteed through June 30 of this year is no longer relevant. Although formal agreements have yet to be signed, Northeastern administrators value our long history and understand how important Reinhardt is to Mills alums.

Second, that time has really been on our side. Alumnae Relations and the Office of Institutional advancement at Mills College at Northeastern continue to work with the AAMC, and the BOG, as we continue to host jointly sponsored events.

Here are some highlights of events and AAMC work that has transpired during this 2022-2023 term.

The Alumnae of Color Committee headed by Myila Granberry and Adrienne Foster, continues to sponsor its Endowed Scholarship in honor of Alecia Decoudreaux, which now totals over \$280,000. The committee is planning a reception during Reunion, and everyone is welcome to attend.

The LifeLong Learning Committee headed by Connie Davidson and Myila Granberry has held several book club events in person and on zoom this year. Trips to local museums and Bay Area excursions were organized and cooking skills were honed with in person cooking classes at Reinhardt. The Bon Jour Paris cooking class held this month was in Connie’s words, “the best ever” The committee is planning an upcoming Italian cooking class on July 29th, which you can register for on our website.

The ad hoc Historic Preservation Committee has been formed to research placing the Campanile on the list of state or national historical landmarks. Stay posted and join the effort.

The Branches and Clubs Committee was very active this year. They began their term with a presentation to the AAMC Board of Governors that detailed the history of Branches and Clubs under the AAMC. The committee promoted branch activities and reached out to both established branches and those that had

become dormant. They began to dialogue with alums about forming new branches. A Zoom account was purchased for all alumnae engaging in regional activity to utilize. The Committee rounded out the year by co-sponsoring four events in various regions, furthering our goal of bringing alumnae together. The Committee Co-Chairs Julia Almanzan '92 and Angela Adams De Moss MA '99 wish to thank Louise Leck '11 for her extensive work on the Committee.

The LGBTQ+ Committee has plans for a joint pride event later this year with Barnard College Alumnae, so please stay tuned for this wonderful chance to connect with alums from another respected women's college.

The Alumnae Student Relations Committee headed by Viji Nakka Cammauf and Joyce Yee had a very active term. Legacy students enjoyed traditional events such as Taco Tuesday, the Winter Celebration of mid-year graduates, and the Pearl M Dinner in collaboration with the Office of Alumnae Relations. Several members of the committee collaborated with Student Affairs team, participating in two Alum-Student Careers Networking events.

The Travel committee headed by Debi Wood and Gwen Foster continues to create consistent income for the AAMC as travel picked up as alums used pandemic credits to travel and book new trips. The committee is researching additional travel providers for shorter, in country and more economical travel options, while maintaining strong connections with AHI, our long time travel company.

The newly formed Hospitality Committee headed by Kristen Caven and Angela DeMoss hosted "CommuniTea" socials at Reinhardt featuring a captivating themed event each month, culminating with the June Volunteer Recognition Luncheon where committee chairs and volunteers were recognized and thanked for their efforts. It evoked classic Mills events with silver on display, vintage china provided by volunteers, beautiful table settings and delicious catered food. The AAMC hopes this will become an annual event.

The Communications Committee headed by Karilee Withlin, Kieran Turan and Operations Manager Lila Goehring were consistently updating the AAMC website at aamc-mills.org, posting events on social media and Alumnae Relations sites, managing the AAMC database and updating our internal processes. In addition, oversight of our Mills merchandise, filling, and shipping orders, and selling Mills swag was a continual effort which fell under this committee. Look forward to new products and Mills attire to be introduced at Reunion.

Are you still with me? You have heard the direction under the guidance of the Board that the AAMC has endeavored to pursue. You have heard about the interesting and successful events that have been held. You have heard about pending projects, the Bylaws revision and programs on campus that are still in process. You are reassured that the options vote indeed will happen by the end of the year, with more concrete information than was originally outlined this past fall.

But you still may be asking, what has the Board and the AAMC really accomplished? What about results?

And to answer frankly, Governors have undertaken a journey. In the process, we can report about steps, initiatives, and pending directives, but the first year of any major job or project is typically a year of learning and discovery. In truth, our accomplishments are in large part pending.

You might still press - but why is that?

I will tell you, as a volunteer board grappling with many unforeseen and difficult issues, we have pursued the course of discovery that I have summarized, but it has not been an easy path. I have to tell you we have spent a great deal of time putting out fires. We have consulted our legal team more than 20 separate times this year, not only for the bylaws' revision process, but for rulings on current Bylaws, direction for controversies that have come from within the Board, and from passionate alums outside the Board.

So, what about the next term, you ask? Now that I can answer with some clarity.

You are voting remotely to elect a new Vice President, and 4 Governors from a field of 10 new and returning Board members. You are also voting for 6 new members for the nominating committee for 2023-24.

This election is a first in the annals of AAMC history, largely as a result of some dissatisfaction last year with the uncontested election. With the influx of new leaders which you are choosing, I look forward to the Board moving forward with new ideas, and with a commitment to move more of our pending items to the resolved column.

And I ask you personally, to please take this coming year to realistically assess just how you want to move forward together.

I ask you in your vote today, in your conduct in this meeting, and in future correspondence with us, to please consider the future you wish to see. If you provide us your vision and your hopes – we can respond to those and work towards them, and develop relationships with stakeholders, including NU, where it is beneficial to those goals.

But on the other hand, if you send us your dissatisfaction and your ire, we must use our limited volunteer time - and our funds - to respond to that. This does matter, because it means less time and bandwidth we will have to communicate effectively with all our members, and to concentrate on what we CAN do, to best shepherd our shared Mills legacy.

IF – we are to truly honor Mills and what we all cherish so much about our shared experience, and see it have a chance to be reborn in some new form – although not the same one – in the future, then we must unite and put the ire and conflict of the past behind us.

Our Board is all volunteers, and for the sake of our precious AAMC –as well as the health and well-being of our Governors, we cannot continue to endure the level of strife that we have over the past 2 years.

So, I ask you, shall we move forward together?

I hope your answer is Yes.

On our part, we will continue to seek and provide more information for you in the coming months, on the important decisions we are facing now, so you are informed and can participate in shaping the future. I, Debby Campbell Dittman, proud member of the class of '68, and Mary Morse resident for four years, active in student government during my college years, active in alumnae branch affairs post-graduation and AAMC BOG affairs for the last 5 years, ask for your support, good will and active, positive engagement with your AAMC, your Board of governors and the committees, as together we continue

our journey looking forward to more answers and fewer questions as we embark on our second transition year.

With gratitude and optimism, all the best to you and yours,

Debby Dittman