

May 12, 2025

Paula A. Johnson
President, Wellesley College
106 Central Street
Wellesley, Massachusetts 02481

Dear President Johnson,

Is Wellesley in trouble? Can future students apply to Wellesley with confidence?

We are a group of current Wellesley parents who believe the students are the heart of the College, and the faculty is its soul. We are exceedingly upset at the College's failure to bargain in good faith with the Union representing non-tenure track faculty (NTT.) The College's intractability has negatively affected our students, the quality of their education, and the once-in-a-lifetime experience they're supposed to have at Wellesley.

We have organized ourselves so we can make clear that we are united in our strong support of the NTT faculty and their Union's entirely reasonable proposals at the bargaining table. We object to the increased teaching loads, meager pay raises, and weak job protections the College proposes for these invaluable educators. Faculty working conditions are students' learning conditions. It is a disservice to students when NTT faculty are underpaid, unsure if their contracts will be renewed, and required to carry unreasonably heavy workloads.

The faculty is what makes Wellesley valuable, prestigious, and special. It isn't the administration or the buildings, but the faculty. We as parents, appreciate the College's tight-knit community, the high quality of its teacher-scholars, and the fact that labs and other intensive classes are taught by top-notch instructors rather than graduate assistants the way they are at larger universities. Our kids emphasize that the NTT faculty play a critical role in their Wellesley experience. One of the biggest draws of Wellesley is the opportunity to choose from a rich curriculum and to enroll in carefully developed classes, taught by instructors who are supported and empowered by the administration. Instead, the administration is acting in the way a profit-maximization enterprise would, with no other goals or priorities. Reducing the cost of instruction reduces the quality and breaks the College's promise.

We have not been provided with a reasonable rationale for the College's insistence on the 5-course load. Inevitably, it would diminish the quality of education and reduce the faculty's availability for student engagement. There is speculation that Wellesley plans to replace its existing teachers with lower-paid new teachers. What exactly is the College trying to do here? Is this paving the way for non-renewals? How does Wellesley expect to retain excellent faculty? How will this impact class size and offerings? How will Wellesley protect its differentiation and value proposition in the long term?

The administration's communications have been haphazard, confusing, and one-sided. We object to your characterization of the College's leadership as benevolent victims trying to ensure Wellesley's sustainability while denigrating NTT faculty as unreasonable. The College retains NTT faculty to provide the full range of course offerings, and as such, advertises the fact that it has the best teacher-scholars in the country. The administration's wrongful treatment of the faculty is short-sighted and jeopardizes the College's long-term well-being. We unequivocally reject the College's demonization of the NTT faculty for striking. If your administration continues on this path, we cannot in good conscience recommend to our friends and relatives that prospective students apply to Wellesley.

It's time that Wellesley stop racking up legal fees in its misguided fight with instructors who are essential to our kids' education. The College's mission should be to provide a top-notch education to students in an environment where faculty can excel as teachers and scholars, not to maximize savings that grow the endowment. Wellesley boasts an endowment of more than three billion dollars, one of the largest among elite liberal arts colleges. As such, it certainly can absorb the Union's proposed contract. We reject your administration's claim that its hands are tied by an eight-million-dollar deficit, a sum that does not threaten the College's financial stability, particularly since trustees and alumni are more than capable of leveraging their positions and networks to close the gap.

Wellesley leadership's lack of vision and misplaced priorities are what truly threaten the school's long-term stability. The College's aggressive opposition to NTT faculty's need for fair compensation, manageable teaching loads, and secure jobs is what actually puts Wellesley's future at risk. The administration's hostile refusal to bargain in good faith has tarnished the school's reputation as a first-class institution. The College's lack of appreciation of NTT faculty value is at the heart of the problem. This stance degrades Wellesley as a whole.

We are angry at the avoidable hardship Wellesley has inflicted on our young women. The College's unpersuasive insistence that students are its top priority is contradicted by the incontrovertible fact that your administration turned the Spring semester into a colossal mess. The half-baked credit scheme had little, if any, academic coherence or integrity. This abrupt and disruptive slap-dash program in no way compares to the substantively rich courses that students carefully selected to meet their lofty academic aspirations. All of this was against a backdrop of the College's failure to provide congenial working conditions for faculty, breaking the promise it made to them, and to the students they teach and mentor. The spring semester's diminished quality of education is unacceptable.

Your administration's supposed credit fix was predicated on the misguided and demeaning belief that Wellesley students only care about fulfilling their graduation requirements, not the quality of the education they are getting. Furthermore, this supposedly innovative choice to cut class credits is especially reckless in the current political climate. This has been particularly destabilizing for the members of our community who must maintain the requisite course load to qualify for financial aid and/or maintain immigration status. Your bullying tactic was an abuse of power and reflects a troubling disregard for the safety of both the faculty and students.

We object to your administration's efforts to shift the burden of austerity measures onto faculty, students, and parents. What will you and your administration do to make students whole? How will Wellesley ensure students learn essential material that was not taught? It is unacceptable that you have placed the financial burden of potential fixes on students. We paid tuition for faculty to provide a world-class experience, not for administrators to busy high-priced lawyers with an unnecessary labor dispute.

The longer it takes your administration to meet the already heavily modified NTT faculty demands, the worse and more lasting the harm will be to Wellesley and its students. So long as Wellesley refuses to move off its anti-worker position, this disgraceful conduct will diminish Wellesley and our children's experience. We call for an immediate resolution. It is imperative that this standoff not extend into the summer or fall. We are committed to fighting for as long as it takes to win a fair contract for NTT faculty. The sooner this is resolved, the more likely our trust in Wellesley can be rebuilt.

Moving forward, we expect:

1. Transparency about Wellesley's situation, brand, and stability.

Communication should be prompt and include information on where students, parents, and other stakeholders can go to dialogue with the administration. We also want to hear directly from the unionized faculty. The one-sided communication that we have gotten so far isn't cutting it.

2. Transparency about Wellesley's goals, strategy, and principles.

Clearly communicate your goals as they relate to the caliber of the faculty, diversity of class offerings, class size, and uniqueness of the academic program.

3. Provide a plan to repay the investment that the families made in an education that our children have not received.

The improvised solution of "jump to other classes as you see fit" is not satisfactory.

NTT faculty are fundamental to what makes Wellesley special. We reiterate, they, along with the rest of the faculty, are the soul of the College. We urge you to turn the page and work to find common ground with WOAW-UAW.

Sincerely,

Wellesley Parents For A Better College