Alumni-led fundraising to save Hampshire College has surpassed one million dollars in pledges, marking the start of an intensive campaign to raise funds to keep Hampshire operating as an autonomous institution with its full faculty and staff.

Initiated independently but working in coordination, the two campaigns, HampshireFuture.org and CampaignforHampshire.org, have each set a $15 million goal. According to Hampshire College President Miriam “Mim” Nelson, the school had held a $30 million fundraising drive over the fall as a “test” of its supporters’ capacity to keep the college operational. The college’s inability to reach that goal was cited as a reason for recent decisions to pursue a merger, undertake massive layoffs of faculty and staff, and not accept a full fall 2019 class.

But Steve Aronstein of HampshireFuture.org noted that a number of wealthy alumni and other donors that alumni fundraisers recently contacted have conveyed that the college did not reach out to them during its fall fundraising initiative. HampshireFuture.org, which launched on Saturday, grew out of a previous fundraising initiative to show the Board of Trustees that there was wide community support for them to admit a full fall class. Although that fundraiser was deactivated when the Board voted not to accept a full fall class, the effort garnered over $345,000 in pledges from nearly 500 Hampshire community members within a two-day period. At the February 15 #savehampshire teach-in at Hampshire College, Aronstein described its success as a proof of concept “demonstrating the claims that there is no money available are disingenuous.”

Campaign for Hampshire has also been working for the last few weeks to get large donations for the school. The campaign aims “to keep Hampshire College open as an autonomous institution with its original mission intact.” Currently, they have raised over 1 million dollars in pledges toward their 15 million dollar goal.

The fundraising campaigns come in the midst of rising tensions between faculty and college leadership following the faculty’s attempt to hold a Vote of No Confidence in President Nelson and Board officers. The vote followed the president’s February 19 announcement of layoffs, the first of several rounds expected to affect 30–50 percent of faculty and staff. The Hampshire College AAUP chapter notes that due to the nature of the academic hiring cycle, laid-off faculty will not be able to apply for equivalent job positions until fall 2019 and those positions would not begin until fall 2020.
Online voting was held on February 19 and 20, but the results were not released after the Dean of Faculty raised a procedural objection. Multiple anonymous sources have reported that faculty have since been told that a Vote of No Confidence would result in trustees pulling their planned gifts and that Hampshire’s bonds might then be pulled for immediate payment, causing the school to close in May and leaving faculty and staff without severance pay.

“It is my understanding that any threats during labor negotiations may be considered an unfair labor practice. Additionally, the Trustees of Hampshire College Code of Conduct mandates that they agree to act in the best interests of the College. Any type of threat, whether that be a threat to close down the college or a threat to withhold severances to the faculty, breaches that code of conduct whether it comes from any one of the Deans, the administration, the President or any one of the Trustees. The severity of threat has also led me to ask, why is a symbolic vote causing this much push back? Are there conflicts of interest? We are investigating right now given the trove of emails provided by the Daily Hampshire Gazette last friday.” – Evan Barett Brandes, alum, F94.

The student group Hamp Rise Up, now in day 29 of its sit-in in the president’s office, issued its own statement regarding the intimidation of faculty:

“These actions are evidence of the senior leadership’s failure to work with the community they claim to represent. Holding the entire college hostage as they demand obedience from campus constituencies is antithetical to Hampshire’s Mission and only furthers our distrust in them. Their actions make it clear to us that they are unwilling to be transparent or embrace a shared governance model essential to Hampshire College.”

#savehampshire is a growing group of alumni, parents, and other Hampshire community members that formed to support faculty, staff, and student demands for greater transparency and shared governance, and to defend Hampshire’s unique educational model.

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