Brackett's Path

Health & Safety Addendum
Brackett’s Path: Health & Safety

Executive Summary

Content Warning: Sexual Assault, Self-harm, Suicide

Speaking on a panel in October 2021 as Senior Counsel at the law firm Goodwin Procter and Chair of the Kenyon Board of Trustees, Brackett B. Denniston III said he believes that mental health is the responsibility of colleges and their trustees to address: “We’re in an age where mental health is a much bigger problem than it was ten years, twenty years ago, and a lot of that falls on the shoulders of universities and colleges to deal with. And boards are gonna have to deal with that, as well.” What does “dealing” with mental health and other health and safety concerns at Kenyon mean to Brackett Denniston?

Under his tenure, the College has responded to a series of lawsuits by male Kenyon students accused of sexual assault by gutting and eliminating peer support services, such as Peer Counselors (PCs), Sexual Misconduct Advisors (SMAs), Sexual Respect Peer Alliance (SRPA), and Beer and Sex Advisors. In so doing, Denniston has treated students who are struggling with mental health and sexual assault trauma, and the programs that are meant to support them, as a liability for the College. At the same time, he has kept staffing at the Cox Health and Counseling Center and Student Accessibility and Support Services (SASS) untenably low, making it next to impossible for them to provide adequate professional services to students and shifting responsibility for mental health toward policing. Such systemic failures impact Kenyon’s most marginalized students and student workers the most, including international students, students of color, and LGBTQ+ students. Denniston’s neglect of student health, safety and wellbeing has also extended to allowing unsafe living and working conditions in campus buildings and failing to prioritize students’ timely access to federal money owed to them, including COVID-relief money and Federal Work Study.

Before becoming Chair of the Board of Trustees, Denniston was the highest paid General Counsel (GC) in the country based on his annual cash compensation from General Electric (GE), which was $5,827,000 in 2014. One of his primary roles as GC was to protect the company from liability and save GE money through early dispute resolution when the company

---

Brackett’s Path: Health & Safety

faced lawsuits. Evidently, Denniston has brought his management philosophy as GE General Counsel to Kenyon. From raising costs, to systematically understaffing and underfunding departments, to prioritizing liability concerns, to union-busting, Brackett Denniston is running this school like a business. As the contents of this addendum will show, this – Brackett’s path – is coming at the cost of the health, safety and wellbeing of students and workers at Kenyon.

Key Findings

- Testimonials from Miraela Fan, former Class of 2023 and MLL Teaching Assistant (p. 9-10), Dennis Frimpong, Class of 2024 and OGI Intern (p. 16-19), Sonia Suben, Class of 2025 and FYE Front Desk Worker (p. 29-30), and Gavin Trautman, former Class of 2025 and Helpline Consultant (p. 42)

- In the 2019 Kenyon Healthy Minds Study, 44% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with finding convenient hours at the Counseling Center, exactly twice as many as the national sample; 65% of Kenyon students were dissatisfied with the time it took to schedule an appointment with a therapist, versus only 30% of students nationally (p. 12)

- The number of Kenyon students citing financial reasons as a barrier to receiving therapy, counseling or medications has nearly tripled in the last three years, and the number of students who are not sure where to go to seek help for mental or emotional health has more than doubled (p. 13)

- In 2021, 19% of Kenyon students contemplated suicide. Eight percent made a plan, and 2.5% attempted. Forty-five percent self-harmed (p. 19)

- Thirty percent of dispatched calls originating from Kenyon College reported by the Knox County Sheriff’s Department in 2022 thus far (up to Oct 24) have involved mental health crises; these mental health calls made up 9.4% of dispatched mental health-related calls county-wide, despite the student population of Kenyon making up only about 3% of the total population of Knox County (p. 19)

- In 2019, 18% of students at Kenyon had been sexually assaulted during their time Kenyon, up from 9.8% in 2015 and 11% in 2017; according to the same 2019 survey, the number of students that had been assaulted at Kenyon was 80% greater than those at comparable, small peer institutions (p. 21)

---

While Kenyon has repeatedly celebrated scoring **5 out of 5** on the Campus Pride Index, the most recent scorecard saw Kenyon’s rating downgraded to a **4 out of 5**, driven by negative changes across many of the index’s rating criteria around maintaining a safe and welcoming environment for LGBTQ+ students *(p. 25)*

Massive new buildings coming online has led to each of Kenyon’s skilled trades maintenance workers being individually responsible for maintaining **over 65,613 square feet** of building space – this has led to the deterioration of campus buildings, including widespread mold outbreaks in several residence halls and apartment blocks *(p. 27)*

**75%** of residence halls on campus do not have a full sprinkler system, and **58%** have no sprinkler system at all *(p. 30)*

Brackett’s Kenyon has yet to spend **22%**, or **$470,783.98**, of its student portion of federal funds provided as part of the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) during the pandemic; that is **nearly 7 times** as much unspent student emergency grant money as higher ed institutions state-wide, proportional to Kenyon’s size *(p.35)*

Between 2014-15, the year before Denniston became chair of the board, and 2019-20, the fall before the pandemic started, the retention rate at Kenyon for first-year students fell from **97.7%** to **89.0%** *(p. 40)*
Data Discussion

This addendum makes use of a combination of student and institutional surveys in which Kenyon has participated, federally-mandated reports, government data, and national listings. A brief discussion of key sources used in this report is included below:

HEDS Campus Climate/Sexual Assault Surveys

These surveys are conducted annually by the Higher Education Data Sharing (HEDS) Consortium, a nonprofit organization which works on collecting and sharing data at colleges and universities. The questions on this survey focus on students’ perceptions of their campus’s climate, institutional response to sexual assault on campus, and whether they have experienced sexual violence. Kenyon has participated in this survey every two years since 2015, and has made the results available on their website under the Office of Institutional Research for 2015, 2017, and 2019.4

Healthy Minds Study

The Healthy Minds Study is distributed annually to college and university students in participating schools by researchers at the University of California-Los Angeles, the University of Michigan, Wayne State University, and Boston University. It seeks to provide information about mental health outcomes and mental health service utilization on college campuses. Kenyon participated in this study in 2019 and 2021 and plans to continue distributing it every three years.5

Clery Act Security and Fire Safety Reports

The Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security and Crime Statistics Act, or Clery Act, requires colleges and universities to publish a Security and Fire Safety report every year. These reports include crime statistics and data on fires and fire protection systems on campus. This addendum utilizes Kenyon’s 2022 Security and Fire Safety Report, in addition to the most recent reports from each of Kenyon’s self-selected peer institutions – Bates College, Bowdoin College, Carleton College, Colgate University, Colorado College, Connecticut College, Denison University, Dickinson College, Grinnell College, Hamilton College, Macalester College, Middlebury College, Oberlin College, The College of Wooster, Vassar College, and Williams College.6

**Brackett’s Path: Health & Safety**

**Campus Pride Index**

The Campus Pride Index is a national listing of colleges and universities which rates campuses according to their commitment to LGBTQ-inclusive policies, programs and practices. The Index provides a rating out of 5 for each college campus in their database based on criteria such as LGBTQ Campus Safety, LGBTQ Counseling & Health, LGBTQ Support & Institutional Commitment, and LGBTQ Recruitment & Retention Efforts. The Index is managed by Campus Pride, a nonprofit organization which works to create a safer college environment for the LGBTQ+ community, and has been active since 2007.  

**Knox County Sheriff’s Law Reports**

Knox Pages, an online news organization in Knox County, includes a webpage section listing law reports from the Knox County Sheriff’s Office. These reports are dated and include short descriptions of individual cases wherein the Knox County Sheriff’s deputies have responded to calls throughout the county. For the purposes of this addendum, we hand-counted each of these available cases and categorized them as originating from a Kenyon source, originating from a non-Kenyon source, mental health-related, and not mental health-related. To categorize the latter cases, we used keywords such as “mental health/crisis/issues”, “suicidal/suicide”, “mental episode”, “self-inflicted injuries”, “harm/hurt themselves/self-harm”, “welfare check”, “take his/her life”, and “psych meds”.  

**Department of Education Education Stabilization Fund (ESF) Data**

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSAA) Act, and the American Rescue Plan (ARP). Each of these contributed a portion of money to the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF I, II, and III). The Department of Education (ED) was given the mandate to distribute these funds under the umbrella of the Education Stabilization Fund (ESF), which also includes funds for elementary and secondary schools and private schools. The ED publishes data on remaining HEER funds at every college and university across the country that was awarded COVID-relief money.  

---

Quarterly HEERF reports

Every college and university that has received HEER funds from the federal government is required by law to publish quarterly reports on its website within a specific timeframe. The reports include details on how each college or university has used the institutional and student portion of its allotted funds. Kenyon has published its quarterly reports from Dec 2021, Sept 2021, Apr 2022, June 2022, and Oct 2022.¹⁰

Common Data Sets

These reports come from the Common Data Sets (CDS) Initiative, an annual survey developed and spearheaded by the College Board, Peterson’s, and U.S. News & World Report, who make up the CDS Advisory Board. They include questions around broad categories such as enrollment and persistence, academic offerings, annual expenses, financial aid, and faculty and class size. The CDS Board does not release comprehensive data reports on each college, but colleges and universities typically publish their own data on their websites. Kenyon has provided data for every year from 2001-02 to 2021-22 under its Office of Institutional Research page.¹¹

---

**Fig. 1: Brackett’s Path - Health & Safety Timeline**

- **2013**: Stephen Zingarelli sues Kenyon College, a student who accused him of sexual assault, and a Sexual Misconduct Advisor (SMA).
- **2014**: Michael Hayes’ blog post “To Kenyon College, For Failing My Little Sister” makes national news after Kenyon dismissed report of sexual assault made by Chelsie Hayes.
- **2015**: A male Kenyon student with multiple allegations of sexual assault against him sues Kenyon.
- **2016**: A male Kenyon student accused of violating Kenyon’s Sexual Misconduct and Harassment Policy sues the College.
- **2017**: Brackett Denniston III takes control of Kenyon Board of Trustees.
- **2018**: Kenyon dismantles Peer Counselors in order to limit liability.
- **2019**: Kenyon strips SMAs of their ability to provide effective peer support due to liability concerns; 16 out of 17 SMAs resign in protest.
- **2020**: New Directions terminates partnership with SRPA.
- **2021**: Beer & Sex Advisors nonexistent, following similar policy changes as PCs and SMAs in 2018.
- **2022**: Kenyon hires Richard Lovering, who defended the College in the Zingarelli case, as General Counsel.

- **Numbers**:
  - Freshman Retention Rate: 173 (97.7% in 2015, 93.4% in 2017, 88.7% in 2021)
  - Students who have been sexually assaulted at Kenyon: 244 (197 in 2017, 329 in 2022)
  - Students Self-Harming: 310
  - Students per FT Healthcare Worker: 841 (633 in 2022)
In the winter of 2015, as Brackett Denniston was preparing to take over as chair of the Board of Trustees, student perception of Kenyon’s support system was at a high point – 75% of Kenyon students believed that there was “a good support system at Kenyon for students going through difficult times,” 21.4% above what students at small peer institutions reported. Only 7.4% of Kenyon students thought support was insufficient. After four short years under Denniston’s leadership, only 51% of Kenyon students agreed that Kenyon had a good support system for those who were struggling, 17.7% less than Kenyon’s peer institutions. That year, about 512 students felt that Kenyon did not have a good support system for students going through difficult times, 382 more than in 2015.

“My first year at Kenyon was amazing. I was able to get some great help from a counselor who no longer works at Kenyon. But I don’t think I ever got the full support that I needed every time I struggled. International students get a brief talk about mental health services during orientation. You are told you will be able to get help anytime you need it, and you can just stop by, book an appointment and talk to counselors. But there were no follow-ups, no specific guidance on how to reach out for help from academic advisors or counselors, and no mention of the difficulty of possible wait times at the Counseling Center. The administration did very little to help overcome the stigma of seeking mental health support that many students, especially international students, face at Kenyon.

When I came back from a year off during COVID as a junior, things started to go really downhill. I was really struggling with my mental health, which I now know was anxiety, depression, and undiagnosed severe ADHD, and my academics suffered as a result. That fall, I tried getting an appointment with our new psychiatrist at the Counseling Center, but I was forced to wait nearly four months before getting my first appointment, from late October to February. I don’t have a home healthcare provider, so not getting help from the Counseling Center meant not receiving the right diagnosis and medications I needed, and it was just consistently getting worse and worse. The wait time was devastating for me. It made it very hard to talk to faculty and ask for support without a formal diagnosis. I was constantly nervous and criticizing myself, and it really destroyed my self-confidence.

This experience taught me that Kenyon, as an institution, does not actually prioritize the mental health of its students. And it’s not just me — the fact the Cox Health and Counseling Center is closed over winter and summer breaks is a huge problem. A majority of international students stay on campus for the break, and the only mental health resource we have is the ProtoCall line which goes

---

Not being able to get a Counseling Center appointment last year when I was in real need was bad, and I feel it set me up to fail as a student, but maybe my worst experience with Kenyon’s lack of support happened this past summer. I was following directions from Dean Hawks and frantically emailed the Cox Counseling Center over a dozen times to seek documentation support and proof of my own medical records to complete a withdrawal due to illness petition from a class I was struggling in due to my mental health. The Counseling Center said they couldn’t provide my records and told me to go to Dean Hawks, who then told me to go back to the Counseling Center — and after all of the back and forth, I still never got the medical support I needed from Kenyon to complete the petition before I went online myself and found a psychiatrist in Columbus who also informed me of my previously undiagnosed ADHD. This was a major factor that led to my academic suspension and being forced to leave Kenyon.

I remember someone saying that every Kenyon student is going to have some kind of life-changing experience at Kenyon, and that moment can be either very good and positive or something that you would never want to go through again. For me, Kenyon is a great place to be at when you are doing well, but not designed to help you when you are struggling. When you are not doing great, it’s like they don’t care that much. I think most people who transfer, didn’t want to transfer in the first place. They have no choice, either for financial, mental health, or other reasons. I didn’t want to leave. Even now, I’m still not entirely sure what I should have done back then because I just remember feeling that I did everything I could, but nothing changed in the end. Kenyon still forced me to leave. Maybe Kenyon didn’t think I was worth the inconvenience for them to help me stay and thrive here as a student.”

Miraela Fan, formerly Kenyon Class of 2023,
MLL Language TA & proud K-SWOC member

It is not difficult to see why students’ perception of available support at Kenyon may have changed so drastically in that time period. Back in 2015, Peer Counselors (PCs) were trained by the Counseling Center to provide mental health support to fellow students through a 24/7 hotline, small group support sessions on specific mental health issues (including self-harm and body image), and by connecting students to other resources and mental health professionals at Kenyon. The Counseling Center also trained Sexual Misconduct Advisors (SMAs) to act as a

---


Updated 10.26.2022
Brackett’s Path: Health & Safety

confidential resource and peer support system for students dealing with sexual assault or misconduct, and to direct them to counseling when appropriate.\textsuperscript{15} Beer and Sex Advisors also received training and funding from the Counseling Center to offer guidance and support around topics such as alcohol, drugs and sex for first-years.\textsuperscript{16}

In 2018, Kenyon began systematically dismantling these programs by removing their ability to provide effective peer support. The College began by banning the PCs’ 24/7 hotline and small group sessions and undermining their confidentiality by requiring detailed reporting on their interactions with students. This effectively ended Peer Counseling at Kenyon.\textsuperscript{17}

Josh McClain, a former PC, wrote at the time: “The intent of the administration, so far as I can make it out, is to limit liability. That’s a reasonable and necessary aim – of course the college, like any organization, must consider its legal exposure. But if questions of liability are going to simply and seemingly without question – certainly without student input – overrule questions of quality of life and community, Kenyon might as well shut its doors now... For Kenyon to reduce students struggling with mental health to liability concerns is wrongheaded and shows a pervasive and deeply perturbing lack of concern for providing sufficient mental health support.”\textsuperscript{18}

Indeed, Kenyon had been sued in at least two cases before they began eroding student counseling support. In November 2000, Margaret E. Rose sued Kenyon and Ivan Isreal after filing a report of sexual assault against the latter. Isreal responded by suing Rose and the College, as well as then-President Robert Oden, the Dean of Students, and Special Assistant to the President, alleging that he was falsely accused of sexual assault and improperly expelled from Kenyon. The case was dismissed voluntarily in 2004, with signatures from all three parties.\textsuperscript{19}

About a decade later, Stephen Zingarelli filed a lawsuit against Kenyon for breach of contract, negligence and defamation. At the same time, he sued a student who had accused him of sexual assault and a Sexual Misconduct Advisor, alleging that the SMA encouraged his accuser to destroy evidence and that Kenyon was negligent in training her.\textsuperscript{20} Kenyon was

\textsuperscript{18} McClain, https://kenyonobserver.wordpress.com/2018/03/30/kenyon-college-cuts-peer-counselors/.
dismissed from the lawsuit in 2015. In both Isreal v. Kenyon and Zingarelli v. Kenyon, Richard S. Lovering, recently appointed General Counsel and Vice President on Kenyon’s Senior Staff, served as Kenyon’s defense lawyer.

These cases, particularly Zingarelli, were almost certainly on college officials’ minds in 2018 when they subjected SMAs to similar policy changes as they had PCs. These included the termination of their 24/7 hotline and the removal of their confidentiality, as they were now expected to report the names of every student they interacted with to the Title IX Office. Sixteen of the seventeen SMAs resigned from the program in protest, and some of these former SMAs went on to form the Sexual Respect Peer Alliance (SRPA), which maintained its confidentiality by remaining independent from the College.

Since then, the College has been sued two more times by two John Does accused of sexual assault. In the most recent case, filed in 2020, the Plaintiff reportedly shoved and “chest bumped” a Community Advisor (CA) who supported his accuser and pressed charges against him for physical assault. Rather than increase support for victims of assault on campus, Kenyon has only doubled down on its strategy of eliminating peer support.

This fall semester, SRPA unexpectedly and inexplicably lost their partnership with New Directions, a local domestic abuse and rape crisis center who they partnered with in 2020. This has effectively taken away SRPA’s ability to provide sexual assault advocacy services to their peers, since they function independently from the Counseling Center. At the same time, Beer and Sex Advisors are no longer meeting with first-years. This comes after changes made to the program over the 2018-19 academic year, including requiring CAs to attend Beer and Sex meetings, banning Advisors from providing their personal phone numbers to residents, and subjecting the group’s manual to external review.

Kenyon’s trustees have not replaced or supplemented programs like Peer Counselors, Sexual Misconduct Advisors, Beer and Sex Advisors, and the Sexual Respect Peer Alliance with increased institutional support. If anything, the College has scaled back on the availability of professional resources for students at the same time it has gutted peer support.

In the 2019 Kenyon Healthy Minds Study, 44% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with finding convenient hours at the Counseling Center, twice as many as the national sample.


Updated 10.26.2022
(22%). At the same time, 65% of Kenyon students were dissatisfied with the time it took to schedule an appointment with a therapist, versus only 30% of students nationally.25

Both the 2019 and 2021 study also survey factors such as difficulty finding an appointment, financial barriers, and lack of clarity on where to go for counseling as reasons for receiving fewer mental health services than needed. As Fig. 2 shows, difficulty finding an appointment is a barrier to help-seeking for Kenyon students at a rate of three times as much as college students nationally.

Fig. 3 compares responses to this question by Kenyon students in 2019 and 2021. These results reveal that the prevalence of these barriers have only increased over the past few years. Notably, the number of Kenyon students citing financial reasons as a barrier to receiving therapy, counseling or medications has nearly tripled, and the number of students who are not sure where to go to seek help for mental or emotional health has more than doubled. Additionally, about half the amount of Kenyon students between 2019 and 2021 reported preferring to deal with issues on their own or no need for services, suggesting that the demand for mental health services among Kenyon students has skyrocketed.

This semester, Kenyon has been advertising its participation in the JED Campus Program sponsored by the Jed Foundation (JED) Higher Education Team, a non-profit focused on emotional health and suicide prevention among teenagers and young adults. Over four years, the program is “designed to help colleges evaluate and strengthen their mental health, substance misuse, and suicide prevention programs and systems in order to ensure the strongest possible mental health safety nets.”

It is therefore concerning that in JED’s initial evaluation of mental healthcare, they deem Kenyon’s staff-to-student ratio at the counseling center to be a notable strength for the College, noting that the ratio is less than 1:1000, which meets JED’s recommendations. They also congratulate the College for reducing waiting times for counseling by “extending the time between appointments for established clients” and recommend “refer[ring] students to off-campus providers during busy periods” to reduce waiting times further. Ironically, JED adds that Kenyon “may want to consider adding peer mentoring programs on

---

campus, as students are likely to turn to peers when they are struggling and tend to be more open to messaging from other students.”

As shown in Fig. 4, a significant portion of Kenyon students face mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. Compared to students nationally, more than twice as many Kenyon students struggle with eating disorders, three times as many have OCD or related disorders, and twice as many have some sort of neurodevelopmental disorder or intellectual disability, such as ADHD.

In her 2021 Collegian op-ed “I’m a person, not a liability: Instead of supporting me, Kenyon tried to kick me out for having a mental illness,” Emiliana Cardinale ’21 stresses that “on paper, Kenyon has a great counseling center. However, in practice, the resources are often just not enough.”

---


Updated 10.26.2022
There are currently five therapists employed at the Cox Health and Counseling Center.\(^{29}\) Let’s assume they all work 40 hours a week, and all they do is see patients back-to-back for 45-minute sessions. It would take about three weeks for them to see all 826 students (44% of 1877 enrolled students) with an anxiety disorder for one session.\(^{30}\) Assuming paperwork, intake and other administrative responsibilities take up about a fourth of each therapist’s time, it would take about one month. For students with diagnosed anxiety alone, that would allow a student to get a maximum of three 45-minute appointments in an entire semester, or 2 hours and 15 minutes total with a therapist.

At the same time, the Office for Student Accessibility and Support Services (SASS) currently has only two staff members.\(^{31}\) Again, assuming they each work 40 hours a week, and there are 263 Kenyon students with a neurodevelopmental disorder or intellectual disability (14% of 1877 enrolled students), SASS staff would only be able to devote 18.25 minutes a week per disabled student. This, of course, does not take into account students with physical disabilities or the staff’s administrative responsibilities.

As highlighted in “Brackett’s Path: A Review of Brackett Badger Denniston III’s First Term as Chair of the Board of Trustees,” this staffing storage is on top of a severe lack of healthcare practitioners and technicians serving the entire student population. Kenyon has one full-time healthcare worker for every 633 students. These healthcare practitioners would be physically unable to see every one of these students for one 1-hour appointment within one semester, even assuming that they spent every working hour seeing patients back-to-back.

Dennis Frimpong, a sophomore from Ghana, was severely injured in a terrible car crash during the summer of 2022. Despite members of the Kenyon student body successfully fundraising to help pay for his immediate surgery, Dennis has suffered from physical and neurological side-effects throughout this Fall semester:

The first day back on campus, I had a meeting at the Cox Center with Chris Smith and administrators from multiple offices. We went over what needs to be done, including setting up a voicemail on my phone to get appointment calls from doctor’s offices, getting a general review from a doctor, etc. I waited for three weeks to hear back from Cox, I was checking twice a week. I continued to have severe symptoms during these three weeks that were extremely affecting my classes, including new symptoms that were worrying me. First time I reported this to the Health Center, they said it was allergies and gave me 14-day allergy pills to take. They knew I was in a car crash; I told them specifically I did not have allergies. I’m 22 years old, I’ve never had allergy symptoms before.

\(^{29}\) “Counseling Staff,” Kenyon College,

\(^{30}\) “Enrollments and Class Size,” Kenyon College,

\(^{31}\) “Our Staff,” Kenyon College,
Finally, I got to meet the College Physician, Dr. Hansen. He said he would set up a CT scan for me at Knox Community Hospital (KCH). I was always, always on my phone for every little notification hoping it was a call from KCH. But I waited and waited and still didn’t get the call. The symptoms at this time were still affecting my classes. One of my professors told me "You are missing too many classes, I know you were in a car crash, but if you miss any more classes you need to talk to Dean Hawks." I had gotten SASS to send a letter to all of my professors. One of my professors sent an email to the CGE and the Deans; the response from them was that I should speak to the Cox Center, which I had been doing for weeks and got no help. The administration said I need to set up a voicemail. But I did. That was the first thing I did. They were trying to blame me. **I did everything they told me to do and I still wasn’t getting the call, still wasn’t getting the support I needed.**

I reached back out, again, to Cox. Their response was that I was sending emails directly to Cox staff when I should be sending them to the Cox organization account. Cox, once again, told me I haven’t set up my voicemail and that I was missing calls from the hospital. I told them I set up the voicemail, I can send you screenshots of the voicemails I’ve received so far and that doesn’t include any from the hospital. I was so furious, because my symptoms were still affecting my classes. The saddest part is, I didn’t know what was wrong. After weeks of trying to receive care, I did not know what was happening to me.

Finally, my advisor reached out to KCH and they did not have me listed on the CT scan schedule. KCH said they had received no correspondence from Cox about a request for my CT scan. Then my advisor reached out to Cox and after that, finally, KCH told me I had an appointment. After the CT scan, I was diagnosed with traumatic brain injury. This was after Fall Break. It would have been better if I knew what was really wrong with me earlier so I could explore my options for care. This has been the story of my life at Kenyon this year.

Now I am considering taking a gap semester. If you think about it, it’s crazy. **Everyone back in Ghana said I will have better care in the U.S. for my injuries. But I’ve been here close to two months, and I still haven’t gotten proper treatment.** The only medical care I’ve received from Cox is allergy pills. I don’t wish for this to happen to anyone. I pray that no international student has the slightest health issue, because if you get into a situation like mine, you are on your own. You have no family here, and you’ve entrusted your care in the College to help and assist you in times of need like this.

Kenyon should do better. A friend of mine at Amherst College was experiencing head injuries, and he got a CT scan the next day. Kenyon says Amherst College is a peer institution. It took me four weeks to get my CT scan. At the same time this was happening, Kenyon misplaced my timesheets. I came into one of their offices and they said they can sometimes do a “special check” to cover missing wages. But they refused to do this special check for me. This was before Fall Break, before my CT scan, when I needed my back wages the most. Then they told me to go to ODEI — for my own wages! This is the same ODEI I have
asked for support for my travel, for other things, and it sometimes took two weeks for them to respond. The issue with ODEI I have is that it makes you feel like you are begging. When they told me to go to ODEI for my missing wages, that I worked for and earned that the College was not paying me, it’s like they said “go and beg for your own money.”

I don’t think the Cox Center represents me – they represent the College. If the College does not prioritize student health, the care Cox Center provides will not be adequate. If the College cared about students, I think my experience would have been different. There are more than enough resources for Kenyon to adequately fund the Health Center. How can there not be resources for healthcare? Kenyon will not change these issues on their own. Speaking up and creating awareness is the best route we can take. It comes from someone putting themselves out there. Many students might have tried getting help from the administration, Cox Center, and have given up. People only go to Cox for painkillers, for allergy pills. I was not the first victim, and I won’t be the last anytime soon, unless we do something about it.

I think the most dreadful thing to happen to anyone with health issues is having symptoms and not knowing what is wrong with you. If I had gotten the CT scan earlier and seen the results and diagnosis, I think it would have made a huge difference. I would have been able to seek proper external care. It has been almost 8 weeks of school this semester. I have missed more than 3 weeks of class and in one of my classes, I’ve already missed 25% of the classes scheduled for this semester. I still don’t have a treatment plan from Cox, so I have to seek external help. Kenyon is breaking its promise to support me as a student. They are breaking their promise to me, to my people back home, and, I think, to themselves. What Kenyon has represented online, all of the fancy things about this school—they have been dishonest to lots of people. If you write on the website telling international students that Kenyon gives students the necessary support they need. And then you come here and you realize the support they promised on the website, on Cox’s website, is not really available, it is kind of like a betrayal.

I volunteer for an NGO back home advising people going through the College process. Now I tell them, “take Kenyon off your list.” I don’t like contacting any office in the administration, because it feels like I’m bothering people. When I tell people I haven’t been getting the necessary support, it makes me feel like I’m disturbing them with my issues, like I’m an inconvenience to the College. They say they are here to support me, but their feedback and actions don’t match that.

If someone at Kenyon says the problems at Kenyon don’t rise to the level of needing a union, I’m sorry, that is totally stupid. For someone to think that, it is totally ignorant. I read comments about K-SWOC on YikYak, and I get so furious. I think to myself, “Do you even know what students are going through?!”
When I heard that recently Miraela, who the College kicked off campus, was entering her senior year, I was furious. I thought she was a freshman. This was the cruelest thing to do, to strip three years of hard work away from a student like that, from an international student. I mean, with the current inflation affecting families, for her family to contribute to Miraela’s education at Kenyon for three years, and then Kenyon still chooses to suspend her. Damn.

Dennis Frimpong, Class of 2024,
Office of Green Initiatives Intern, & Proud K-SWOC member

Cardinale writes in a follow-up to her op-ed in the Collegian Magazine: “I was unable to set up a weekly appointment at the Counseling Center due to a change in policy that happened in the fall of 2016, a year before I got to Kenyon. The policy made it so that a student would have to schedule their next appointment at the end of their session without any guarantee of a slot at the same time every week. According to a September 22, 2016 Collegian article, the change was due to a shortage in available appointments, a solution chosen as an alternative to simply hiring more counselors. Transitioning from a structured weekly appointment to inconsistent sessions was extremely difficult for students like me, and what I really needed at that time was stability.”

“The one resource that was truly helpful for me was the peer counselors,” she continued. “...I remember writing a note late in September, and talking to a peer counselor on the phone that day. Our conversation was what convinced me not to hurt myself. The peer counselor I talked to made me feel like maybe Kenyon wasn’t such a lonely place and maybe I could eventually find a place here. He gave me hope. The connection he provided me with, for even those few hours, meant so much.”

In 2021, 19% of Kenyon students contemplated suicide. Eight percent made a plan, and 2.5% attempted. Forty-five percent self-harmed.32 How many of these students struggled to find the help they needed at the Cox Center? How many could have benefited from peer support systems like PCs? The decision to consistently understaff and underfund the counseling center is not merely an accounting decision – it is a direct detriment and threat to student lives.

---

Thirty percent of dispatched calls originating from Kenyon College reported by the Knox County Sheriff’s Department in 2022 thus far (up to Oct 24) have involved mental health crises. For context, these mental health calls from Kenyon made up 9.4% of dispatched mental health related calls county-wide in 2022, despite the student population of Kenyon making up only about 3% of the total population of Knox County.33

According to a 2020 NPR article on mental health and police violence, an estimated 20% of calls for police service nationally involve mental health or substance abuse crises. “Woefully inadequate mental health services” and an inability to refer people to needed treatment is a large driver of this trend.34 There is no reason Kenyon should be supplementing inadequate mental healthcare on campus with service from the Knox County Sheriff’s Department, putting students, especially students of color, in unnecessary danger.35

By focusing on liability concerns and stripping the Health and Counseling Center and peer support to the bone, Kenyon’s trustees and administrators are actively protecting predators like Zingarelli and counting on its most marginalized students not to put up a legal fight. Perhaps this is the lesson they learned in 2016, when Chelsie Hayes reported her rapist, who told her she was “too cute to be a lesbian”, to the Title IX office, only for them to decide that they had no reason to suspect rape and rejected her appeal.

Though her story made national news after her brother Michael wrote a viral letter entitled “To Kenyon College, for Failing My Little Sister,” Chelsie was forced to withdraw, forfeit her credit for the semester and return home. She said to Newsweek at the time, “After the appeal, there was nothing left of me. I felt dead inside. It made me feel like Kenyon really didn’t care about me or what happened to me. It was like I was at the edge of the cliff and that just pushed me over.”36

---


34 Quick Facts: Knox County, Ohio,” United States Census Bureau, 1 July 2021, https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/knoxcountyohio


In 2019, 18% of students at Kenyon had been sexually assaulted during their time Kenyon, up from 9.8% in 2015 and 11% in 2017. According to the same 2019 survey, the number of students that had been assaulted at Kenyon was 80% greater than those at comparable, small peer institutions. Fig. 5 illustrates an increasing lack of institutional support for those Kenyon students from 2015 to 2019.

*No data available for 2015

Brackett’s Path: Health & Safety

Everyday that Brackett’s Board decides to keep the Health and Counseling Center and other student support services understaffed and underfunded, they are telling us that they think these numbers are acceptable. Kenyon has collected and reviewed this survey data on mental health and sexual assault on campus since 2015. Brackett Denniston and his administration are okay with the fact that about 156 more Kenyon students on campus in 2019 had experienced sexual assault than when his term began. He is fine with the fact that 531 more students were self-harming in 2021 than in 2019. And judging from the fact that services and support have continued to deteriorate, he will accept many more.

The world Denniston operates in is completely disconnected from the lived experiences of students on this campus. According to a 2020 survey of trustee members of the Association of Governing Boards (AGB) of Universities and Colleges, of which the Kenyon Board of Trustees is a part, 79% of respondents believe that their board spends too much or just the right amount of time on student health and safety. Additionally, 76% of respondents from private/non-profit institutions believe their institution is prepared or very well prepared to address the issue of student mental health, and 80% believe they are prepared or very well prepared to address sexual misconduct at their institution.38

To Denniston, “addressing” these issues means protecting the College, even if it comes at the cost of student safety and wellbeing. Most recently, Denniston and the board brought an in-house General Counsel and Vice President onto Senior Staff for the first time in Kenyon’s history – Richard Lovering, who defended the College in the Isreal and Zingarelli cases.39 Information is not yet available on Lovering’s annual salary; however, Oberlin College paid their VP, General Counsel and Secretary $196,811 in 2020. According to IPEDS, the total amount Kenyon spent on salaries for healthcare practitioners in 2020 was $185,395.40 If that is a fair comparison, Kenyon could have easily doubled their healthcare staff instead of creating a new position on Senior Staff. They simply chose not to.

As former PC Josh McClain wrote in response to Kenyon dismantling Peer Counselors: “Policy is the product of moral choice. We might think about that broadly – how we approach healthcare or taxation on a national scale – but it’s true at every level of administration in every organization, including Kenyon. The choices we make about what we fund, what we allow, what we support, are moral choices. They reflect our view of the world, our place in it, and our relationship to others.”

Brackett’s Path: Health & Safety

The consequences of our Board of Trustees’ abandonment of their responsibility to health and safety has been disproportionately borne by the LGBTQ+ community on campus. On March 2, 2022, LGBTQ+ student leaders delivered to President Decatur a list of demands for Kenyon to concretely address transphobia and transmisogyny:

1. Ending trans-coverage exclusions in both the student and employee health insurance plans
2. Holding true to Kenyon’s commitment as a member of the Equality Ohio led coalition—Ohio Business Competes—and publicly speaking out against anti-trans bills in the Ohio Statehouse
3. Investing in the creation of specific resources for the trans femme community at the college
4. Identifying concrete ways to show value and respect to transgender people—and especially trans femmes—at the college
5. Creating more affordable single-occupancy rooms for gender diverse students who need a more private living space (without requiring them to make an ADA claim due to a diagnosis of gender dysphoria to access that)
6. Re-issuing a public statement of support for Dr. Debussy.

The urgency around these demands were driven in part by the utter lack of support provided by the College to Dr. Dorian Rhea Debussy, who was, at the time, serving as the Associate Director for the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ODEI) and Visiting Assistant Professor of Women’s and Gender Studies. In January, Dr. Debussy had publicly resigned from her position as volunteer facilitator in the NCAA’s LGBTQ One program in protest of the NCAA’s updated transgender athlete participation policy, which she described as part of a “devolving level of active, effective, committed, and equitable support for gender diverse student-athletes within the NCAA’s leadership,” in a statement published by Athlete Ally.

Dr. Debussy’s public resignation and subsequent interview with Sports Illustrated about the new policy sparked a wave of targeted, online hatred — amplified in alt-right media spaces — that included threats to Dr. Debussy’s safety. Despite pressure from LGBTQ+ students on campus and multiple allied organizations like Equality Ohio and TransOhio, the Kenyon administration did not release an official statement until four weeks after Dr. Debussy’s resignation, and even then the statement “failed to acknowledge or condemn transphobia, transmisogyny, or threats of violence against Dr. Debussy.”

41 “Kenyon College students deliver a list of demands to college president to address transphobia and transmisogyny,” The Buckeye Flame, 8 Mar 2022, https://thebuckeyeflame.com/2022/03/08/kenyon-college-student-deliver-demands/#comments.
43 “Kenyon College students deliver a list of demands to college president to address transphobia and transmisogyny,” The Buckeye Flame, 8 Mar 2022, https://thebuckeyeflame.com/2022/03/08/kenyon-college-student-deliver-demands/#comments.
Kenyon’s failure to support Dr. Debussy was a flagrant manifestation of its failure to support the health and safety of LGBTQ+ community members. However, as the list of demands presented to President Decatur last spring demonstrates, this has been a long-running failure. For example, the College’s exclusion of many gender transition-related benefits in the student insurance plan demonstrates that this is a pattern of failure of supporting trans students on campus. In the 2021 Plan Document for the Kenyon College Student Health Benefit Plan (administered by Wellfleet), Kenyon explicitly excluded from coverage “Cosmetic procedures related to Gender Reassignment including but not limited to rhinoplasty, face lift, facial bone reduction, lip enhancement or reduction, blepharoplasty, body contouring, reduction thyroid chondroplasty, hair removal, voice modification surgery, skin resurfacing, chin implants, nose implants.”

It is important to note that classifying medical procedures related to gender transition as “cosmetic,” according to Lambda Legal, is a discriminatory myth that is “out of touch with current medical thinking” and has been struck down by federal courts (See O’Donnabhain v. Commissioner). Perhaps due to the fact Kenyon’s student health insurance plan in 2021 was openly discriminatory, the 2022 Plan Document for Kenyon’s student health insurance now includes a new “Gender Transition Benefit Rider” that covers “Medically Necessary expenses incurred for services and supplies provided in connection with gender transition when You have been diagnosed with gender identity disorder or gender dysphoria” (emphasis added). However, according to Wellfleet’s “Utilization Review Guidelines - Transgender Services,” this rider still explicitly excludes “Body Feminization Surgery.” Additionally, the definition of “Medically Necessary” in the 2022 Plan Document includes the following condition: “The fact that any particular Physician may prescribe, order, recommend or approve a service or supply does not, of itself, make the service or supply Medically Necessary.” Thus, even for gender transition services that are supposedly newly covered under the 2022 plan, Wellfleet, acting on behalf of the College, could still deny coverage for transition-related care or impose unreasonably high barriers to accessing these medically necessary services.

The ambiguity of this new “gender transition benefit rider” suggests the College may be more interested in insulating itself from liability for inappropriately labeling gender transition procedures as cosmetic, rather than prioritizing expanding the coverage and easing the affordability for trans healthcare.

---

Failing to concretely address transphobia and transmisogyny with the actionable steps provided by LGBTQ+ students on campus has real consequences. Failing to foster an inclusive and supportive environment for openly LGBTQ+ staff to the point where such staff have to leave Kenyon has real consequences. These consequences are reflected in Kenyon’s decline in scores on the Campus Pride Index. While Kenyon has repeatedly celebrated scoring 5 out of 5 on the Campus Pride Index, the most recent scorecard saw Kenyon’s rating downgraded to a 4 out of 5, driven by negative changes across many of the index’s categories:

![Fig. 7: Campus Pride Index National Listing of LGBTQ-Friendly Colleges & Universities](image)

The fact that Kenyon failed in so many of these categories in the Campus Pride Index just months after Dr. Debussy left her position at Kenyon demonstrates that the support for LGBTQ+ students was built, in large part, on the undervalued labor of a single College staffer — not to mention the immeasurable amount of unpaid labor of LGBTQ+ students supporting each other — and was not backed up in any meaningful sense by an institutional commitment from our administration and Trustees to the health and safety of the LGBTQ+ community on campus.

---

Last spring, LGBTQ+ students demanded concrete action on crises facing trans students on all sides — healthcare, housing, in national politics — as well as the repair of harm done by the College’s silence in the face of one of their own staffers suffering repeated, public, targeted discrimination. So far, the College has not even had the humility to respond to these demands, let alone act to meet them. As former Student Council President Micah Smith said in an op-ed to the Buckeye Flame in response to President Decatur’s Trans Day of Visibility Statement blog post, “While words without action are exactly what I have come to expect from cisgender people when we have these conversations about visibility, we must do better. Making a mistake is one thing. However, repeatedly and consistently making the same mistake—while then asking for grace—is an attempt to escape fault and, therefore, consequences for bad decisions. Again, we must do better.”

Part II: “I don’t feel safe”

Moldy Buildings, Understaffing Maintenance and Putting out Fires

In its own data on mental health and sexual assault, in the peer support groups it has shut down or let disband and refused to replace, in the reduction in full-time healthcare staff, and in the downgrading of its Campus Pride Index, it is abundantly evident that Kenyon’s decision-makers are systematically abdicating their responsibility for promoting student health and safety. This abdication of responsibility, however, goes so far as to even be baked into the most important features of Kenyon’s physical presence — our residence halls and apartment housing — stretching back decades.

The New Apartments, or New Apts, are perhaps the most well-known example on campus of Kenyon’s persistent challenges with safely housing its students. Originally built in the 1970s, the New Apts allegedly had a planned 20-year lifespan. Instead of planning ahead to build additional, permanent housing capacity that would allow for the phase-out of the New Apts, the College has kept students living in these apartments for over 30 years past their intended expiration date. During that time, Kenyon residents at the New Apts have lived through fires and floods, experienced gas leaks and hot water outages, contended with rodent infestations and, infamously, have been repeatedly exposed to respiratory sickness-inducing black mold.

According to Kenyon Collegian archives, mold infestations have forced New Apt. residents to relocate at least three times since 2003, including, most recently, the residents of D-block this fall. In this most recent instance of mold infestation, the residents in the affected apartments were “kept in the dark” — even though they had been experiencing mold-related symptoms since

the first week of the semester and conducted their own testing that came back positive for black mold — until their parents got involved and began contacting administrators.52 One of these residents, Sari Wagner ‘23, expressed concern that her experience was not an isolated case:

“Just on an anecdotal basis, the number of students that I’ve talked to who have said that they feel sick, who have said that they’re concerned about having mold in their New Apt, that they would like information on testing from me, like ‘could you share that information?’ The fact that I have had that experience I think speaks to the fact that this is not an issue that should be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, that it is widespread and should be dealt with that way.”53

In comments to the Collegian, Vice President for Facilities, Planning, and Sustainability Ian Smith claims that the “fundamental principle” of the College’s response to building safety concerns “is to correct root causes.” Yet, in practice, the College’s response to mold infestations in the New Apts this year and in previous years can only be described as reactive, rather than proactive. For example, Vice President Smith, along with every other member of the administration or Board of Trustees, has refused to respond to the data in K-SWOC’s original “Brackett’s Path” report which revealed staffing in the maintenance department has been dramatically outpaced by added building square footage in new construction on campus.54

**Massive new buildings coming online has led to each of Kenyon’s skilled trades maintenance workers being individually responsible for maintaining over 65,613 square feet of building space.**55

The more square footage maintenance is responsible for, the less time the department will be able to dedicate to preventive maintenance that can reduce the likelihood of problems like mold infestations cropping up in the first place. Our administration’s unwillingness to conduct preventive maintenance is a major problem, especially when Vice President Smith has publicly suggested that residential mold hazards are not isolated to the New Apts.: “Smith disputed the popular narrative that the New Apts are constantly infested with mold. He said that, in general, New Apts do not have mold levels higher than those found in the surrounding environment”

---


53 Comments provided by Sari for “Brackett’s Path: Health & Safety Addendum”


55 Numbers calculated from Sq. Footage Facilities data and “Nat. Resources, Construction, and Maintenance” staffing data from IPEDS self-reported from Kenyon in original Brackett’s Path report.
Indeed, as the mold in a Milk apartment unit in Fig. 8 demonstrates, mold has been reported in multiple residences across campus, not just the New Apts.

However, once again contradicting his own stated goal of getting to the “root cause” of residential hazards like mold infestations, Vice President Smith defended the administration’s position of not conducting regular testing for mold until after a student reports an issue, usually after they are already suffering debilitating health symptoms. Under this policy, Kenyon students have been reduced to test subjects sacrificing their own physical health so the College can avoid the inconvenience of conducting regular testing for mold or investing in genuine preventive maintenance to attempt to eliminate mold from residential spaces altogether. As Sari Wagner ‘23 writes,

“In general, I think if you were being a responsible custodian of students’ health, which is what Res Life is supposed to be, and you knew that [the New Apts had a history of mold and flooding], you would be testing and checking to make sure that this is in fact safe housing instead of actively avoiding it and actively not testing and assuming that it’s fine. I think that given the information that exists, Res Life has reason to be concerned and to be investigating this issue, but they’re not and I think that says something.”

The College’s recent long-term plans for campus housing do not show any signs that the Trustees will be prioritizing student health in their decision-making. Their decision to construct three massive apartment-style dorm buildings on South Quad with a $100 million anonymous donation will only add 109 new beds over the next three years, with the last new dorm slated to come online in 2027. In the meantime, the College has built “temporary” 130-bed modular housing behind the Lowry Athletic Center. According to Kenyon’s website, dimensions for Meadow Lane rooms measure at “about 75 square feet” — just 5 sq ft more than the minimum total space required for single cell units at adult local detention facilities in the U.S.

According to an op-ed in the Collegian by Cyrus Griffin ‘25, student residents at Meadow Lane have already experienced a litany of health and safety issues including “broken locks, oversensitive fire alarms, leaking roofs and flooded rooms.” These issues point to a central question: is the cost of isolating 130 students from the main campus community in a

57 Carnell, https://kenyoncollegian.com/news/2022/10/mold-infestation-forces-students-out-of-two-new-apartments. In fact, Director of Residential Life Leah Reuber explicitly states the threshold for the College to even consider professional mold testing is either residents visibly identifying mold or experiencing an “abnormal change in their respiration.”
hastily-built complex and condemning them to repeated building safety issues for, potentially, the next five years worth it to our Trustees?

“I didn’t expect to live in a trailer when I came to Kenyon. And when I saw pictures of them over the summer, I’m worried that this sounds spoiled, but I cried. I was like “I can’t live here.” My immediate thought was “I’m gonna be so depressed if I’m living that far away from everyone.” And it’s tiny, which I don’t think is conducive to a good work environment.

There’s no sense of community in the mods. My parents and I were pretty concerned and sad about that, especially at the beginning of the year. There’s no gathering place, we had no floor meeting because there was nowhere to have it. The only other place you see other residents is in the locker room. There’s nowhere to sit with other people. You can have one person over at the time because of how big the rooms are. The only reason I feel like I can live down there without feeling super lonely is because I’m really lucky to have a great suitemate. But that’s the only reason. We were told that a lounge would be built by the end of September but it’s not done, and I don’t know when it will be.

Now that it’s colder, the steps leading up to the mods are coated in ice. They’re made of wood, which makes me think they’re going to rot. When I moved in, the window was broken, when I know for a fact that I’m the first person who lived in that room. Initially I requested someone to fix it, but all they did was put duct tape over it and left. It took a month for them to actually replace it.

But the main problem is the lack of light at night. I had an experience where I was walking back at 1 in the morning, which is normal for a college student on the weekend, and there are lights that are on the hill to the KAC which were not on, so it was just pitch black. I called campus safety the next day and asked them to make sure the lights are on at night, and they said they would change the times the lights were on, but it happened again, so they didn’t fix whatever was wrong. Now we have these stick garden lights by the football field and the porta-potties, which are two feet tall and light up when you walk by them, and nothing else.

I think if you ask any female student on this campus they would be scared to walk at night in a place with no lights and no people. My roommate had an experience where a car was following her as she went into the building at night, and I’ve heard from people who have experienced similar things. Last year I felt so safe on campus when I lived in the first year quad because there were always people around. But I don’t feel safe in the mods. I talked to my mom on the phone about this and she said I needed to get campus safety or someone else to drive me home at night, which I refuse to do because that’s a whole other set of problems. If it’s to the point where my parents are telling me not to walk home alone at night in this tiny town, it’s not a good situation.
After a rainstorm one night, I woke up and the shirt I had been sleeping in was wet. I pulled back the sheets and the entire top part of my bed was soaked, a lot of the stuff on my desk as well. A lot of people had their laptops get wet. I couldn’t figure out where the water was coming in from, and requested that maintenance come in and look at it. It turned out that the water wasn’t coming in through the ceiling but the walls, because the walls weren’t closed fully. After the first flooding incident, I got an email from my CA asking for pictures of any water damage so I could send them to maintenance. But I never heard anything from the College.

I was at work and someone in the student experience office told me, “Someone probably just did a shitty job building your mod.” And all I thought was, “What do you mean? Why were they allowed to do that?” I don’t think any of the mods are well-built, everyone I know had the same problem more or less. And to be told that “someone” didn’t care about how they were building our housing just makes me think that the college should make sure that they did care. It’s not fair.”

Sonia Suben, Class of 2025, First Year Experience Front Desk Worker, & Proud K-SWOC Member

As prominent as New Apts mold infestation issues and the Meadow Lane housing have been in our community discourse, the reality is the majority of Kenyon’s housing puts students at grave risk. According to Kenyon’s most recent Annual Security and Fire Safety Report, 75% of residence halls on campus do not have a full sprinkler system, and 58% have no sprinkler system at all. These dorms include Old Kenyon, Leonard, Lewis, Gund, Norton, Manning, and Bushnell, which have no sprinkler systems, and McBride and Mather, which have partial sprinkler systems. In addition, the New Apts, Morgan Apartments (Milks), Aclands, Crozier House, and Thomas House lack any sprinkler systems.63

Current Ohio Building Code requires the installation of an automatic sprinkler system in college dormitories with more than two floors above ground level, or more than ten occupants per floor.64 While these requirements may vary for existing buildings and structures built before 2017, these regulations would apply to every residence hall on campus if it were built today.

* Every residence hall at Grinnell College is equipped with a partial sprinkler system.

**No data available for Middlebury College.

These regulations are in place because, as our Trustees and Administration should know, sprinkler systems are there to save lives and prevent injury. According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) study, out of every 100 lives that might be lost to a fire in a building without an automatic extinguishing system, 89 would be saved with the installation of a sprinkler system. Out of every 100 people who would sustain injuries, 27 less would be wounded.65

---

Notoriously, nine Kenyon students were killed when Old Kenyon burned down in February 1949. This was not completely unavoidable. In his account of the Old K fire, Mike Harden writes, “Even as President Chalmers was pledging, in the fire’s aftermath, that Old Kenyon would rise again, state officials were citing numerous fire violations of the old structure, including inadequate fire escapes, the absence of fireproof interior stairwells, and no fire-alarm system.” If Old K’s fire escapes were up to code, for example, instead of “a vertical succession of steel rungs” which “compelled [students] to leap sideways from the window ledges of their rooms” in order to reach a rung, the two students who jumped from the third floor to escape the flames may well have survived.66

Similarly, there is an early record of New Apt F-2 catching fire in 1978, within one decade of its construction: “The fire, the cause of which is unknown to this day, also spread to Apartment F-1 downstairs, which also experienced significant damages. While the fire itself was troubling enough, the incident also revealed an even larger issue: The New Apts, despite having been occupied for five years prior, did not have any smoke alarms.”67

Fire damages, injuries and lives lost do not happen in a vacuum, and they can almost always be mitigated to some degree by the proactive installation of adequate fire protection systems. Taking responsibility and stewardship over student lives and safety means prioritizing their

---

protection to every reasonable extent. If Kenyon’s peers, by and large, can manage to fully sprinkler their residence halls, that should be a bare minimum expectation of reasonable fire safety at this College.

Fig. 10: On-Campus Housing without Automatic Sprinkler Systems
Part III: “Kenyon would have ruined my life”
Manufacturing Inaccessibility to Federal Funds Owed to Students

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSAA) Act, and the American Rescue Plan (ARP). Each of these contributed a portion of money to the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF I, II, and III). The Department of Education (ED) was given the mandate to distribute these funds under the umbrella of the Education Stabilization Fund (ESF), which also includes funds for elementary and secondary schools and private schools.

The HEERF includes an institutional portion and a student portion. The institutional portion is designated for use to cover expenses including “lost revenue, reimbursement for expenses already incurred, technology costs associated with a transition to distance education, faculty and staff trainings, and payroll.”68 Any remaining funds in the institutional portion may also be used to provide additional emergency grants to students, meal vouchers, subsidized public transportation and parking for students, subsidized on- and off-campus housing, textbook vouchers, and mental health and healthcare services and support (expanding campus health services, assistance with student health insurance, health fees, and associated out-of-pocket expenses, and telehealth services). Crucially, ED guidelines say that “HEERF grant funds can be used to pay for staff or contractor work to coordinate, plan, or implement services that continue to support students’ basic needs throughout the pandemic and beyond.”69

The student portion, which must be no less than fifty percent of the total grant, is reserved for providing immediate emergency financial aid grants directly to students for “expenses related to the disruption of campus operations due to coronavirus.”70 This can include needs such as food, housing, course materials, technology, health care, and child care.

The Department of Education keeps a record of the amount of funds they have disbursed to each institution and how much of both the institutional and student portion has been spent by the institution to date. According to the ED’s page on Kenyon, the College has spent 100% of its institutional portion of HEERF funds, or $2,512,583. According to Kenyon’s October 2022 quarterly report on HEERF expenditures, the College “used institutional funds to purchase

---


testing kits for the student body and reserve additional housing space for isolation of students receiving a positive test.\textsuperscript{71}

On the other hand, as of September 30, 2022, Kenyon has yet to spend 22\%, or $470,783.98, of its student portion of the funds.\textsuperscript{72} As Fig. 11 shows, the only two of Kenyon’s self-selected peers that have not spent the entirety of their student portion – Bowdoin College and Williams College – had not spent 10.2\% and 10.7\%, respectively, of their student portion funds as of June 30, 2022.\textsuperscript{73} For further context, only 3.3\% of the student portion of HEER funds awarded to all higher ed institutions in the state of Ohio had not been spent as of August 31, 2022.\textsuperscript{74} In that respect, Kenyon has nearly 7 times as much unspent student emergency grant money as institutions state-wide, proportional to its size, and assuming the state-wide percentage has not decreased further between Aug 31 and Sep 30.

\textbf{Fig. 11: Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) Student Portion Spending}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Student Portion Spent</th>
<th>Student Portion Not Spent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kenyon College</td>
<td>$1,669,746.02</td>
<td>$470,783.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bates College</td>
<td>$2,203,761.00</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowdoin College</td>
<td>$2,336,000.00</td>
<td>$264,381.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carleton College</td>
<td>$2,685,188.00</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colgate University</td>
<td>$3,748,466.00</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado College</td>
<td>$7,695,419.00</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut College</td>
<td>$2,768,978.00</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denison University</td>
<td>$4,092,837.00</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dickinson College</td>
<td>$3,266,344.00</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grinnell College</td>
<td>$3,756,769.00</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamilton College</td>
<td>$3,526,901.00</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macalester College</td>
<td>$3,999,308.00</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middlebury College</td>
<td>$3,309,446.00</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oberlin College</td>
<td>$3,252,419.00</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The College of Wooster</td>
<td>$3,265,765.00</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vassar College</td>
<td>$3,273,813.00</td>
<td>$391,147.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{71} “Quarterly Budget and Expenditure Reporting for all HEERF I, II, and III grant funds,” Kenyon College, 10 Oct 2022, \url{https://www.kenyon.edu/files/resources/003086500_heerf_q32022_101022.pdf}, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{72} “Quarterly Budget and Expenditure Reporting for all HEERF I, II, and III grant funds,” Kenyon College, 10 Oct 2022, \url{https://www.kenyon.edu/files/resources/003086500_heerf_q32022_101022.pdf}, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{74} “ESF Transparency Portal: Ohio,” COVID Relief Data, \url{https://covid-relief-data.ed.gov/profile/state/OH}.
It is not difficult to see how this could be the case, since the College has been negligent, sluggish and opaque around the distribution of COVID-19 federal student grant funds since the beginning of the pandemic. First of all, Kenyon’s 2020-21 financial audit shows that the College was late in posting public-reporting disclosures on their website for both the student and institutional portions of its HEERF II awards, as required by the CARES Act. The College’s explanation for this violation was that “management did not update the reports due to expenses not being reconciled to the grant timely to allow reporting in the required timeframes.”

Furthermore, Kenyon claims in its April 2022 report on HEERF Student Share Grant Funds that “the College has developed an online application process for students to request emergency relief funding, and made the application available in June 2020... Upon availability of the online application in June, students were notified of its availability and encouraged to organize expenses related directly to the interruption of on campus activity due to the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Currently, with over $470,000 left to distribute, the only way to access this online application form is through a barely visible link in the middle of a section on “Isolation” on Kenyon’s general COVID-19 Information page. The only relevant information provided is the following: “Students experiencing financial hardship due to loss of income during isolation or other factors should complete this form.” The form itself, entitled “Financial Aid Special Circumstances Request for Enrolled Kenyon Students,” makes no mention of HEERF, the CARES Act, the CRRSAA Act or the American Rescue Plan. There are no guidelines given about grant eligibility or expected grant amount.

Compare this approach to that of Kenyon’s peer institutions, who were able to distribute their grants in a timely manner. By and large, these colleges published separate, clear and transparent information and guidelines about their use of HEERF funding on their websites, and included easily accessible FAQs to help their students navigate and understand the process of receiving these grants.

Oberlin College, Denison University, Grinnell College, the College of Wooster, and Colgate University are five good examples. Oberlin’s FAQs clearly states that the maximum grant

79 “Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF),” Denison University, https://denison.edu/campus/covid19/higher-education-emergency-relief-fund-HEEL.
81 “HEERF (Higher Education Emergency Relief Funds),” The College of Wooster, https://wooster.edu/guide/heerf/.
82 “Higher Education Emergency Relief Funds (HEERF),” Colgate University, Spring 2020, https://www.colgate.edu/colgate-together/university-policies-during-covid-19/higher-education-emergency-relief-funds-HEEL.
amount students can expect is $1,500 per student and that their “goal is to distribute the funds as quickly as possible.” Denison clearly lists grant eligibility requirements. Grinnell offers complete transparency about the email instructions provided to students about the Emergency Financial Aid Grants. Wooster encourages international and undocumented students, who were not eligible to receive HEER funding under federal guidelines, to reach out to the Dean of Students, who had other non-federal emergency funds available. **Colgate University did not require an application and automatically distributed funds directly to students through bank deposits or checks, based on their demonstrated financial need.**

**Fig. 12: Colgate University Policy on Distribution of Student Portion of HEERF**

Another source of federal funding that Kenyon’s trustees and administrators could have made more available to students during the pandemic was Federal Work Study (FWS). According to Kenyon’s 2020-21 Financial Audit, the College’s total FWS expenditures for that fiscal year was **$66,492**. The previous year, the College disbursed **$167,489**, meaning that total FWS expenditures went down by **60.3%**. The financial needs of Kenyon work study students certainly did not decrease by sixty percent during the pandemic.

---


Updated 10.26.2022
It is worth noting that, in November of 2020, K-SWOC delivered a petition signed by nearly 200 student workers, alumni, and faculty allies to the Kenyon administration requesting they extend work-study financial relief to on-campus work-study students — mainly first-years and sophomores in Fall 2020, and sophomores, juniors, and seniors in Spring 2021. At the time, Kenyon had made use of federal funds to refund work-study allotment in financial aid packages of remote work-study students as a direct check, regardless of whether they held a job or not. But this policy was not extended to on-campus work-study students, who faced a scarce on-campus job market that left many of them unemployed. The College denied K-SWOC’s petition and deprived on-campus works-study students, especially those in the sophomore class, of thousands of dollars of potential relief.

As shown in Fig. 13, guidance on FWS expenditure during the COVID-19 pandemic from the Department of Education explicitly allowed colleges and universities to continue to pay student workers FWS wages for hours they were not able to work due to COVID-19 disruptions, such as closures or quarantine. It is inexplicable why Kenyon’s policy in 2020 reflected a very different reality of austerity and neglect of work study students’ financial security.

Kenyon’s attitude of scarcity and insecurity toward student employment and work study is not new. Positions for work study students at Kenyon are not guaranteed, and hardly prioritized. According to the Career Development Office (CDO) Kenyon webpage, “Student work is at-will and not guaranteed for any student. Student work is an open and competitive application process.”

There are other colleges and universities where work study students can generally expect to work on campus and get the hours they need to meet their allotment from semester to semester. At Grinnell, for example, not only are first-year students on need-based financial aid placed into

---


---

Updated 10.26.2022
a job, but they are made aware of their placement before the semester begins, allowing them to plan ahead.⁸⁷

**Fig. 14: Grinnell College Student Employment Policy**

Working on campus at Grinnell can help you pay for your educational expenses and develop professional skills.

**How do I find a job?**

First-year students who receive need-based financial aid will be placed into a job over the summer before they arrive on campus. They can keep this job placement, apply for other jobs by searching the online job board (login required), or choose not to work. All Grinnell students who are eligible to work in the United States can apply for jobs through the job board.

At Carleton College, work-study students can fill out an interest form and receive a work assignment curated to their experience and interests by mid-August.⁸⁸ Clearly, there is a different way of doing things. Kenyon makes the choice to put its work-study students into an employment system defined by uncertainty and instability.

---

Though it is difficult to measure the comprehensive outcome of the policies set by Denniston, the other trustees, and senior administrators, retention rates are one good indicator. In 2014-15, the year before Denniston became chair of the board, the retention rate at Kenyon for first-year students (i.e. the percentage of freshmen enrolled in Fall 2013 who returned in Fall 2014) was 97.7%. In 2019-20, the fall before the pandemic started, the freshman retention rate had fallen to 89.0%. That means that out of about 480 freshmen in 2013, 11 withdrew or transferred; in 2019, out of about 540 first-years, 59 left Kenyon — more than five times as many as before. Under Denniston’s leadership, forty-eight more first-years decided that Kenyon was not right for them. While we cannot know the individual stories and experiences of every one of these former Kenyon students, the state of student health and safety at Kenyon makes this increase seem less than surprising. A three-year rolling average is used to better illustrate the long-term trends in the freshman retention rate in Fig. 17.

---

Fig. 17: Freshman Retention Rate (2005-2022)

Three-year rolling average, calculated from all available Common Data Sets published by Kenyon and Peer Institutions
“After I was admitted, I filed an appeal of my financial aid package after my parents split up to ask for more aid, and I was flatly denied. I knew I probably wouldn’t be able to afford to come back. Not receiving the aid you need from the college starts to limit your options. Take out more debt? Work more jobs? Beg relatives? It is humiliating. You have to live the whole year under the stress and burden that you are sacrificing so much to go here.

I did not get into any of my preferred classes in both semesters, and got all 8:10/9:10 classes that I knew I wouldn’t be productive in. I was persistently sleep-deprived, I had a terrible meal schedule, I was not doing well mentally. I was breathing in mold, which I am allergic to, in McBride every night. I didn’t know this until I met with an allergist in the summer after getting tested, who told me my respiratory illness symptoms during my time at Kenyon were caused by mold. When you are focused on trying to breathe in class, obviously you are not going to learn. I felt like I physically could not keep up with my class schedule that I didn’t even want to take in the first place. Looking back, it’s just despicable.

Over family weekend, I spoke with a parent about my struggles adjusting to Kenyon coming from an underfunded public school and this parent said Kenyon was wasting their money on low-income people who are ‘not prepared’ for a Kenyon education and should be focused more on students from private prep schools. They basically told me I don’t belong at Kenyon; that I was a waste of space.

I thought I needed to just tough this out, because I thought that’s just what had to be done. When it got to an unsustainable point of self-hating, I eventually realized I needed to leave Kenyon. Knowing now, at my new school, that I am a person able to succeed at academics and at extracurriculars, I feel gaslit; Kenyon made me feel like I wasn’t able to succeed as a student, that what I went through was my fault.

I could not fathom spending three more years here. I honestly think that Kenyon would have ruined my life if I had come back as a sophomore. I felt worse off as a human being at Kenyon than when I was admitted, which is the exact opposite of what you want out of college. It saddens me that there is a world where I could have done well at Kenyon, if I had the right support. That is very bittersweet.”

Gavin Trautman. Formerly class of 2025, Helpline Consultant, & proud K-SWOC member.
Conclusion: Our Path

The ramifications of Brackett and his Board’s choices – cutting peer support services, understaffing the Health and Counseling Center and SASS, ignoring the needs of the College’s LGBTQ+ students and other marginalized communities, failing to invest in building safety and accessibility, holding existing federal money and aid hostage from the students who need it most – are deeply detrimental. These choices have impacted and damaged the lives of hundreds of students from year to year, often irreparably. This approach to running a college, which places institutional reputation and endless growth over student lives, pushes out those students who are most marginalized and struggling the most. Needlessly losing people like that is a tragedy for the whole community.

In response to “Brackett’s Path,” which broadly highlighted understaffing and lack of student support, the College’s primary defense was to say they had severely misreported their own staffing data. It should be easier for the College to respond to the points laid out in this addendum, as there is no misreporting years of student experience. Frankly, any response short of reversing the path Kenyon is currently taking would be shameful.

To Brackett Denniston and the Board of Trustees: Invest in the healthcare and mental health support students need. Prioritize safety and inclusivity for your most marginalized students. Safeguard the health and security of the students who work for you and the Kenyon community – healthcare support, paid time off, including sick, mental health and academic pay, guaranteed jobs for work-study students, a living and dignified wage, post-graduation security. Transform the lives of your students for the better, rather than for the worse.

Students have been asking the College to take responsibility for their health and safety long before K-SWOC existed. Often, these very students have had to assume the role of supporting and protecting their peers in the absence of institutional care. Rather than change course, Brackett’s Board has only made things worse. He has made it more difficult for students to support each other. He has done everything in his power to silence and push out students and staff members who advocate for themselves and for one another. He maintains his influence and his path – his uncaring, business-model vision for Kenyon – by making every one of us feel alone. That is why he is doing everything in his power to prevent us from taking our path – our union.

Updated 10.26.2022