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NEWS

Considering the Dalton Experience Retrospectively: A Chat with Dalton Alums

FEBRUARY 20, 2025 BY MIKA HIGGINS-WOO

At the dawn of the spring semester, college becomes a common topic of conversation among Dalton high schoolers. Aside from well-celebrated visits from friends who graduated from Dalton in past years, though, there is very little official communication between recently graduated students and current students regarding how Dalton prepared them for college, or the major similarities and differences between their Dalton experience and their new college experience. *The Daltonian* reached out to a handful of recently-graduated Dalton alums to hear their takeaways from their Dalton experiences, what they miss about Dalton, and how Dalton's academics and the three pillars of the Dalton Plan have affected their lives in college.

When asked to reflect on their Dalton experiences, the majority of alums gave responses about academics and the way in which the rigor of the Dalton curriculum prepared them for college-level classes and assignments. Felix Norris-Lindsay '25, currently a freshman at Pace University, remarked that, as a student majoring in the performing arts, "the classes I took at Dalton are likely to be some of the most challenging academic classes I'll ever take in my life." He added that he can definitively state that "across all subjects in every class, Dalton maintains a very high standard of academic rigor" that prepared him well for the classes he is taking in college. Similarly, Tessa Chaet '25, now a freshman at Wesleyan College, remarked that Dalton prepared her for "college-level" classes: "I always thought of Dalton as 'college-like' and that has proven to be true from my experiences so far. I mean, if you can speak up in a Dalton History class, then a college class feels like a piece of cake."

Naomi Gomel '24, now a sophomore at Middlebury College majoring in Economics, mentioned that the lab system at Dalton really allowed her to feel comfortable reaching out to her professors. "A lot of other students at my college view office hours as intimidating or a sign of weakness because oftentimes you go there when you are confused or don't understand something, but I view it as a strength and it has made my learning experience so much more fulfilling and personalized." She credited Dalton's core pillars and stressed that "'lab' certainly played a huge part in contributing to [her ease in reaching out to professors], and I am forever grateful!"

In addition to Dalton academics and lab culture, alums mentioned how the strong performing arts program at Dalton made a difference for them, Mollie Fink '24, now a sophomore at Northwestern planning to major in Theatre and minor in Business, mentioned how the caliber of the Theater and Theater Tech department classes she took inspired her to do similar things

in college: "as a Theatre major in college, my education in the theatre department — both through classes and extracurriculars — in high school definitely set the tone for how I entered this world in college. I loved getting the chance to take acting, directing, and stagecraft classes at Dalton and getting to perform and direct in high school. I have been able to expand on those passions now because I was introduced to them at Dalton!"

On a more general level, Norris-Lindsay stated that his education at Dalton prepared him to do more than succeed academically in college. "I'm now noticing and appreciating the advantages Dalton gave me as a human being. I've learned clear communication, how to synthesize ideas quickly and formulate a response, how to approach complex problems, how to collaborate with peers and professors alike. The list goes on. So yes, I know how to write an academic paper or a lab report and cite my sources in whatever style, but I also know all of these life skills. And that has made me realize that Dalton is not only set up to create people who are good at work; Dalton is set up to create people who are good at life."

Dalton alums report that they dearly miss a lot of things about their time at Dalton. Hayden Almeraz '25, now a freshman at Cornell, remarked that in addition to his friends and past teachers, he especially misses "the camaraderie that came with going to house every morning." Phoebe Bergan '24, now a sophomore at Vassar College majoring in International Studies, provided an evocative laundry list of features of Dalton that she misses. "I miss knowing the security guards so well that seeing them every morning made my day," she said. "I miss how much lab time teachers had open—going to office hours is surprisingly a lot harder! I miss going to school with my sibling, and being able to bond with the dean of students about 90's rock (shout out to Mr. Lechich!)."

From learning the value of fostering student-teacher relationships through Lab to the community students build through House, Dalton is designed to allow students an easy transition to college life. It teaches students to fearlessly and enthusiastically connect with not only their peers, but also their professors in college, building a community of their own. What will you miss most when you graduate from and leave Dalton? Be sure to come back and visit!

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