

It is very difficult to condense this past year into a few minutes. I hope to crystallize the most important successes and failures of this past year for us as an Assembly, a student body, and as an institution of higher education. First, I want to acknowledge that I shouldn't be the one doing this recap. The person that should be speaking now is Saphire Ruiz, whose leadership, solidarity, and love for justice guided and built this body for the better part of this year. Their commitment to a vision of a better college and world for students has motivated this campus to take action and to envision for ourselves how we can create a more democratic, fair, and empowering campus for every student.

To understand how things have changed over the course of 2021, we should return to where the Assembly was in the year prior. In particular, I think we need to consider what the institutional norms and processes were back then. The last election with more than one ticket for President and Vice President occurred in fall 2016. The idea of somebody using parliamentary procedure to motion for something was foreign. Some ad hoc committees, despite having members and a chair, met rarely, if at all. Confirmations to the J-Board, Honor Court, and Appeals Board were seen as mere formalities, and J-Board confirmations didn't occur in violation of the constitution. Cabinet members were either working alone or with committees of elected Reps that had other responsibilities. The spring elections ended up seeing real competition for seats with many students calling for change, and some incumbents lost. Resolution 20-1 advocating for a student member of the Board of Trustees was the first resolution this body had passed since fall 2017. There was an energy starting in the direction of SA publicly engaging with the College on important issues, but we weren't quite there yet.

When Sapphire, Kavya, and I entered office as outsiders, never having been in the Assembly before, we had individual meetings with every member of the Assembly. We were shocked to hear a refrain in numerous conversations: that College administration would hand projects to committees and the Assembly, and then members would complete them. The administration made requests for the Assembly to distribute goodies, to advertise new programs or events they put on, to take part in College branding content, and more. One person put it to us as admin giving them “little tasks.” The three of us were caught off guard by the extent to which SA often functioned not as an independent representative body for students, but rather an appendage of College administration. To many, “partnering” with the College meant doing what the College asked of them without questioning if it was the best use of time for student advocates. We entered the Assembly at a time where there were mixed attitudes on this role after there had been a slow shift away from it in the fall.

Knowing this, it didn’t surprise us when in January we heard from multiple previous senior members of the Assembly that they felt College administration, especially those in more senior roles, viewed SA as akin to any other student in its input on issues. In other words, in the eyes of the College, SA was just the designated group of students they would talk to rather than an elected representative body of the students.

Student Assembly was not treated as legitimate by senior administration a year ago, or the year prior to that, or the year prior to that. That hasn’t changed, but there are some key changes that put us in a spot where I hope with continued work this body can win legitimacy via building its own power rather than the voluntary concession of

administration's power. As President Eric Cortes-Kopp quoted an anonymous professor last year, "Hamilton is a medieval institution, not a democracy."

The best moments of our term were those where we embraced a combined approach working within constituencies and then bringing policy demands forward as a collective. We started our administration by taking the entirety of winter break to put together more than a dozen students from across campus organizations and constituencies to be on the Mental Health and COVID-19 Student Task Force, and developed one of the most thorough advocacy documents in the history of the Assembly. This produced a response from the College with some small, but notable wins, including multiple extended opportunities for working together on developing new programming and distributing more info about mental health resources, and a switch in orientation from the Dean of Students Office to offer more incentives rather than punishments for following COVID-19 guidelines.

Further, it looks like the outcome of the Student Activities Fund Committee, started earlier this semester, will include some critical overhauls to the Assembly funding model to make it easier for clubs to access funding utilizing declining budgets. We have also been pushing for Student Activities' annual budget to rollover into the next academic year rather than be taken for the general fund, and there is a good chance that happens.

Since we entered office, we were able to negotiate for increased student representation in a number of bodies on campus. It's notable how the three areas where we were able to get increased student representation are some of the areas we and the student body have applied the most pressure since fall 2019. Mental health was a major concern for students in fall 2020, we campaigned with the issue at the forefront, and we

were able to secure an additional third spot for a student mental health advocate on the COVID-19 Task Force. Significant climate justice organizing since fall 2019 played into our negotiations to secure three SA-appointed spots on the Sustainability Working Group. After a year and a half of targeted, explicit public protest and criticism of the College's record on excluding prominent racial justice advocates from the College President's advisory council, we were able to secure Sapphire a spot on the Chief Diversity Officer Search Committee.

What impact have these new spots for representation had on College policy? That varies, and I think in our approach we assumed power beyond what exists within the various College committees, whether they be Trustee-led or administration-led. At the end of the day, we ran into the wall that all formal power on major issues is vested in a very small number of highly paid individuals who are not structurally accountable to students, and whose primary job is to bring in more money and prestige to Hamilton.

Our ticket's biggest mistake for the duration of our time in office was that we predominantly worked towards legitimacy in the eyes of College administration rather than students, faculty, non-managerial staff, parents, and alumni. We often fought for seats in the room rather than policy changes, but the way students have won most policy and programmatic changes at Hamilton for many decades now has not resided within the bureaucracy but outside of it. We ran on creating a student union but spent most of our time trying to prove our voices were legitimate to Senior Staff rather than the constituencies who were experiencing problems and wanted to see change.

Instead, the Assembly should work towards building solidarity among students, faculty, and staff on core issues to work together on pushing for changes. Particular

attention should be paid to the avenues that hold financial and legal leverage over the College. Hamilton is fighting these student worker unions, and will continue to attempt to delegitimize them for years to come, because of the possibility students have to win tangible concessions from them with the threat of a strike. Hamilton cannot operate without its professors teaching, its facilities workers' cleaning and repairing, or its students paying and advertising the College.

Every major shift of power to students in recent history at Hamilton, especially gains for racial justice, have been the result of student protest. The Social, Structural, and Institutional Hierarchies course requirement was created a few years ago largely in response to an anonymous protest group called The Movement that made numerous public demands for the College to overhaul its curriculum and faculty to address social injustices. The Days-Massolo Center came into existence a decade ago as a result of years of protest by the Social Justice Initiative, a group of predominantly Black and Brown students who occupied faculty meetings, picketed Board of Trustee meetings, and challenged administrators both in public and private. While the DMC was altered from what the original organizers intended, it was a victory nonetheless for a militant protest movement. Hamilton College President Martin Carovano, who oversaw the absorption of Kirkland College and defended Hamilton's investments in Apartheid South Africa, was forced to resign due to widespread student protests and a lawsuit the College eventually lost.

Real power for a more just Hamilton resides around us in our classmates and allies in the faculty, staff, and alumni, not above us in administration and the Board. The

Assembly should dedicate its time and resources where it holds the power to create meaningful change.

That brings me to the question of what time and resources we actually have, and some changes that need to occur internally for this body to be the well-oiled machine it can be. These are the issues I feel every student should be made aware of; I will get more into the weeds in some future communications to the Assembly.

In my view, unequal information between members of the Assembly has caused most of the problems we've faced this year. Not every member of the Assembly has the same facts for a variety of reasons including but not limited to: administrators telling individual members of the Assembly that their meetings are confidential, lack of student media coverage of important events and the Assembly, a number of members not reading communications or documents relevant to them, institutional history gaps between people who have been on SA for a while and new members, difficulty getting in touch with each other, and an orientation that should have covered more basics. This unequal knowledge has empowered those who have it and disempowered those who don't. When we do not have a strong common base of knowledge, we have more debates about settled issues, students become confused, disoriented, and less likely to express their views, and many decisions don't consider all the relevant factors and perspectives. Those few members who do have knowledge of institutional history, College policy and programs, and confidential meetings unfairly carry an outsized influence. This held especially true for Sapphire, Kavya, and I. Next semester, I hope the Assembly engages much more closely with this root cause for so many unnecessary arguments that occurred this past year.

With that said, this Assembly has been more efficient and effective than any Assembly any current student has experienced. We passed four resolutions this year addressing mental health, the climate crisis, student unions, and marijuana legalization, more than any Assembly since 2015. We pushed for solutions in dining and parking, and Assembly members' work has been pivotal in the incremental improvements we've seen to increase access to both. We passed multiple by-law and constitutional amendments that substantially improve consistency across semesters for committees and funding, among other issues. We gave deputies to each executive department, enabling much faster and efficient work in the Assembly's core functions. Most of all, we have ensured that when we are working towards resolving problems for students we acknowledge and respond to how those issues impact different communities more harshly than others. It is every single committee's job to center racial, queer, gender, faith, ability, and class justice in its work. While we still have a long way to go I think it is fair to say the Assembly has drastically increased its consciousness and attention to issues of injustice on campus this past year- that trend must continue.

As I close I just want to thank everyone who was a part of this administration for their hard work. Thank you so much to Kavya Crasta '21 for your love and dedication to solidarity, and for kicking off so much of the necessary structural change on the Assembly, and thank you both Christian and Emily for stepping up to the plate out of the Secretary Department when the Vice Presidency opened up. Alex Medina '22, thank you for your fantastic work last semester as Treasurer in a difficult hybrid campus, supporting both in-person and online events and being a strong voice for change. Wriley Nelson '22, you

did an amazing job as Parliamentarian and are chiefly responsible for creating new avenues for voting members to influence the direction of the body through parliamentary procedure, allowing a more democratic body. Savannah Kelly '21, you deserve so much credit for starting the work towards a more equitable and engaged Org Relations Department improving our campus's clubs, and I'm so grateful to you, Nat, for continuing that work and building on it even more. You've done an incredible job and have gone above and beyond in ensuring that student organizations have what they need to be successful while adding new ones to fill niches. Felix, your tremendous efforts towards increasing accessibility to funding and an active policy making Treasury Department are well on their way towards success and I can't wait to see what students can win next semester. Gabriel, thank you for your enduring love for our student union and ongoing commitment to giving it the procedural mechanisms it needs to be efficient. Raymond, you and your leadership in the Secretary Department have transformed what transparency and accountability look like for the Assembly, and I couldn't be more thankful for your diligence. Ashley, you have been the cornerstone of institutional knowledge during our time in office and have built an effective public relations strategy and team, and all students are better off for it.

Thank you to all of you, Reps, Presidents, and Chairs for your commitment to public service this semester and for believing in a positive vision of an Assembly that stands by and for students. I wish you the best of luck in this next semester as you navigate the critical questions of how our collective interests as students may be better represented by the decisions of this College.