Faculty Resolution to keep Middle Path at the center of campus by making it accessible.

We, the undersigned faculty, hereby resolve and urge the Trustees to resurface Middle Path in order to make it accessible to all students, faculty, staff, and visitors.

Kenyon College is fiercely and rightfully proud of its sense of community. Students, faculty and alumni protect the traditions that symbolize that communal identity and embody it for each generation of students. Yet when tradition and community conflict, we have to recognize that traditions are meaningless if they function to undermine the very community they have served to uphold. We have arrived at such a moment with regard to accessibility on campus and the tradition of a dirt and gravel Middle Path. Next year we will welcome a group of students with mobility restrictions to our campus. They applied and were accepted through our rigorous admissions process. They fell in love with the same features of Kenyon and its community as their peers in the incoming class. They will learn the Kenyon songs at orientation, they will sign the matriculation book, but unless Middle Path is resurfaced, they will be excluded from the vital living heart of the Kenyon community. To keep to “accessible” buildings and walkways, these students will be pushed to the edges of our physical community.

Some people have argued that Middle Path must stay a gravel path because of its central role as the heart of the campus—the symbol of Kenyon’s history and community. This is exactly why Middle Path must be accessible to everyone. As the heart of our community and a symbol of belonging, every member of our community must have access to it. We cannot have two classes of community members—those who meet and walk on Middle Path, and those forced to the “accessible” periphery. If we have accepted these students, we have to accept them into our community as well. And that will mean making some changes. Diversity of all kinds cannot be an empty “goal”—and if that is true, it means allowing traditions to evolve (and becoming more diverse).

The best of the Kenyon traditions exist to remind us of the community that stands behind them. Community is what gives them meaning. Resurfacing Middle Path will not destroy tradition, rather by strengthening community it will allow Middle Path to continue to be a symbol of Kenyon’s community for all its members. This is not a gesture or a compromise on behalf of a small group of students—it is a statement of renewed commitment to Kenyon and to the Kenyon community on the part of all its members. Middle Path’s meaning will be enhanced as the new surface will now symbolize acceptance and community just as the gravel has for all these years.