

<http://www.newsday.com/long-island/education/dowling-college-in-oakdale-closes-its-doors-after-48-years-1.11861115>

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Dowling College, the 48-year-old liberal arts school in Suffolk County, will cease operations and close its doors effective Friday afternoon after failed efforts to grow enrollment and find a suitable academic partner to stabilize the debt-ridden institution.

The college's president, Albert Inserra, announced the decision in a statement released by a spokesman just before 5 p.m. Tuesday.

“As painful as this announcement is we want the student body, faculty and alumni to know that we made every effort to form a suitable academic affiliation so that we could keep the college open,” Inserra said. “Unfortunately, despite months of lengthy negotiations we were unable to form such an affiliation, and our only option is to cease operations. This painful decision is a reflection of the unprecedented financial challenges facing countless private educational institutions across the nation and the difficult choices that many must now face.”

#### [Video Dowling College in financial trouble](#)

On Tuesday afternoon — which would have been the start of the college's summer session — the student parking lot was empty on the Oakdale campus, although buildings were open and staffed. The college, which is more than \$54 million in debt, announced on its website that summer classes also were canceled.

College officials now are responsible for implementing a “teach-out” plan to ensure students transition to other colleges and universities. Dowling officials were required to file such a plan by March 1 with its accrediting agency, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education in Philadelphia. The college's accreditation status was to be discussed at the next meeting of the full commission June 23.

Late Tuesday, officials with Molloy College, a 4,600-student private college in Rockville Centre, announced that the college is working with Dowling to assist Dowling students. A transition counseling center will be established and managed by Molloy and will be available to Dowling students starting Wednesday to help them make decisions on how to complete their degrees.

“This is a sad day for everyone at Dowling and, indeed, all of Long Island,” said Molloy College President Drew Bogner. “Our focus at Molloy will be on the affected students; therefore, Molloy is coordinating the development and implementation of a program designed to help Dowling students complete their education and earn their degrees with as little disruption as possible.”

Students and alumni seeking their academic records will be able to retrieve them from the New York State Education Department, state and college officials said. The state education department is responsible for ensuring transcripts are permanently maintained and stored.

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“We will work with the remaining Dowling staff and their students and regional colleges to try and make sure the students have access to their student records, and work to ensure they have the information they need to make the best choice to continue their education,” said Jeanne Beattie, an education department spokeswoman.

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When colleges or universities close, the education department provides guidance and information to help close while also protecting students, a state official said.

The education department requests that the closing college notify current and prospective students; faculty; media; creditors; local, state and federal agencies; accrediting agencies; and neighboring institutions, the official said.

Dowling has been on the brink of closure for a while. Dowling officials had been in talks with several institutions the past few months, including an education investment company based in the United Kingdom, sources had said.

Last week, state Sen. Kenneth LaValle (R-Port Jefferson), chairman of the Higher Education committee, revealed the school’s situation was so dire that it nearly canceled the Class of 2016’s commencement, held on the field at its Brookhaven campus May 21.

Opened in 1968 on the grounds of the former waterfront Vanderbilt estate in Oakdale, the college offered degrees with schools in arts and sciences, education, aviation and business.

The school had struggled for years with financial challenges, changes in leadership and plummeting enrollment.

It had 1,784 undergraduate and 670 graduate students in 2015, according to a Middle States report — a drop of nearly 50 percent from its 4,500 students in 2009.

The most recent cost to attend Dowling — including tuition, room and board and fees — ranged from \$40,000 to \$44,000 per academic year based on a 30-credit undergraduate course load, according to the college's website.

In November 2014, the faculty union approved \$4.7 million in contract givebacks to help close the school's 2014-15 budget gap. It was unclear Tuesday how many faculty and staff would be impacted by the college's closure.

Also in November 2014, Dowling agreed to pay more than \$400,000 to Robert Gaffney, the former Suffolk County executive who served as the college's president from 2006 to 2010, in a settlement of his lawsuit against the Oakdale school. Gaffney's lawsuit, filed in 2010, alleged he was owed about \$375,000, including interest.

"It is my firm belief that the history of Dowling College cannot be dismissed, forgotten or marginalized. Through our students and alumni, Dowling's legacy will continue for decades to come," Inserra said. "We are enormously proud of them, their achievements here at Dowling and their career successes. We hope we have helped them on their road to a better and brighter future."

Inserra was unavailable for further questions Tuesday.

## **A Dowling College history**

- **1955.** Founded in 1955 as an expansion of Adelphi University.
- **1968.** Established as an independent institution and named after its principal benefactor, Robert Dowling — a noted aviator and New York City planner.
- **March 18, 1974.** A fire badly damages the college's Vanderbilt mansion, the institution's main building. It is later rebuilt.
- **Oct. 18, 1994.** Astronaut Wally Schirra opens the college's new transportation campus in Shirley.
- **June 1999.** Five top administrators are fired as part of a reorganization plan.
- **Oct. 26.** Victor Meskill, one of the longest-tenured college presidents on Long Island, is forced out by the board of trustees, who in previous years had lavished on him a large salary and a host of pricey fringe benefits that included a house near the campus and a personal loan so that Meskill could buy a condominium in Montauk.
- **Aug. 31, 2004.** A late-night vote by the faculty on a new contract ensures that professors will be in the classroom for the first day of the fall semester.
- **2006.** Robert Gaffney, the former Suffolk County executive, becomes Dowling president.
- **May 28, 2010.** Gaffney resigns and is succeeded by Scott Rudolph, a trustee.
- **August.** Facing outrage from students and employees over an announcement the previous week, Dowling says its aviation school will remain open. It had said it would stop training pilots to focus on aviation-management classes.
- **June 1, 2011.** Jeremy D. Brown, the former head of Edinboro University in Edinboro, Pa., begins his tenure as Dowling's president.
- **February 2012.** Moody's Investors Service downgrades \$14.1 million of Dowling's already junk-rated bonds.

- **Oct. 10.** The board of trustees names Elana Zolfo interim president.
- **May 29, 2013.** Norman Smith, who was credited with bringing Wagner College on Staten Island back from the brink of closure in the late 1980s, becomes Dowling president.
- **October.** Dowling lays off staff members and reassigns others in a downsizing because of declining enrollment and struggling finances.
- **March 2014.** Moody's says the school is "likely in or very near default" on bonds issued by the industrial development agencies of Suffolk County and the Town of Brookhaven.
- **Aug. 26.** Dowling names Albert F. Inserra, chairman of Dowling's doctoral program in educational administration, leadership and technology, to be the college's chief.
- **Oct. 3.** Standard & Poor's Rating Services indicates a poor outlook for Dowling, dropping its long-term debt rating from B to B-minus.
- **November.** Dowling agrees to pay more than \$400,000 to Gaffney in a settlement of his lawsuit against the Oakdale school.
- **Nov. 12.** Dowling's faculty union approves \$4.7 million in contract givebacks to help close the 2014-15 budget gap.
- **March 2016.** Dowling says it will affiliate with an unnamed academic partner to remain afloat.
- **May 23.** The deal with the academic partner stalls, a state senator announces.
- **Tuesday.** Dowling announces it is shutting down.