

Simon's Rock campus will soon be up for sale as college plans to lay off 116 employees

- By Jane Kaufman, The Berkshire Eagle
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The Kilpatrick Athletic Center at Simon's Rock College Campus in Great Barrington. The town's recent approval of a zoning overlay district for the campus will make it easier for the school to move forward with putting the multi-building property on the market, school officials say.
THE BERKSHIRE EAGLE

GREAT BARRINGTON — With the town's recent approval of a [zoning overlay district](#) for the 275-acre Simon's Rock campus, the college is ready to move forward with selling the property.

John Weinstein, provost and vice president of Bard College at Simon's Rock, said Saturday's vote at Town Meeting was critical in opening up possibilities for wider uses, other than just education, at the campus at 84 Alford Road, therefore making it more marketable to prospective buyers and developers.



John Weinstein is provost and vice president of Bard College at Simon's Rock. Weinstein said Saturday's vote at Town Meeting was critical in opening up possibilities for wider uses.
SIMON'S ROCK PHOTO

Weinstein said the college is in the process of hiring a broker to market the property.

Last week, the college also notified MassHire Department of Career Services that it will lay off 116 employees between June 30 and Dec. 31.

These moves come as the end of the final school year approaches for Simon's Rock in Great Barrington. The school announced in November that it is moving to a new campus near its parent, Bard College in Annandale-On-Hudson, N.Y., and closing its Great Barrington campus.

Weinstein said the college's decision to give [notice in November](#) to both employees and students may have flown in the face of conventional thinking when announcing a major transition, but did not result in a mass exodus of either students or faculty.

“When you really know what's happening, you should tell your community. I don't see what's to be gained by sitting on the information,” he said, adding that there's a modicum of respect in offering early notice.

Just eight of a total of 286 students left midyear and Weinstein predicts there will be 210 students from the Great Barrington campus who will transition to Bard's campus in the fall. They will be joined by an incoming class of about 50 students.

Faculty who wished to leave prior to the finish of the school year were told they could do so and were offered recommendations from the administration, but only two faculty members have done so. Four will retire at the end of the school year. Their names will be announced at the school's May 17 graduation.

Nineteen faculty members — out of a total of 52 — will migrate to Bard's Massena campus, which is contiguous to Bard's main campus at Annandale-On-Hudson.

An additional eight staff members will go to the New York campus in the fall.

Housekeeping and security employees will stay on in Great Barrington through the fall, when the campus will be mothballed, in order to maintain the buildings and oversee security.

The college will also hire Arrow Security to bolster security on the closed campus.

The same groups that have rented space at Simon's Rock in previous summers will continue to do so this summer, Weinstein said, including Great Barrington Public Theater and the Young Writers Workshop.

Weinstein said he did not believe there would be an exodus from Berkshire County of faculty planning to continue teaching at the Annandale-On-Hudson campus, though he said that information is only anecdotal.

He also said some staffers have been able to obtain jobs in parallel educational settings in Berkshire County.

"I think that the Board of Overseers of Simon's Rock had been looking at different ways to address what we were seeing with small colleges and enrollment and finances and so forth," he said. "We first tried strategies that were kind of building up this specific campus."

Those initiatives, including the Bard Queer Leadership program, met with limited success. So when Bard bought the Massena campus a year and a half ago, that presented an opportunity to offer separation for the younger students at Bard Academy, an accelerated high school program for ninth and 10th graders housed in Great Barrington, as well as Simon's Rock students, who are also younger than typical college students.

Weinstein views this move as a way to ensure the future of the early college program at a time when many very small colleges are folding.

"There became the possibility that perhaps this location would enable us to have enough separation to give the students a distinct space and to reflect the difference in age, but enough closeness to have the economy of scale to make this effective," he said.

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Simon's Rock is pulling 238 jobs out of Great Barrington. Can the campus fuel the economy in some other way?

A vocational college or high school? Workforce housing? Residents and town leaders want to make sure the campus isn't sold to the highest bidder. But they do want it back on the tax rolls.



Citing declining enrollment, Bard College at Simon's Rock will close after the spring semester and its Great Barrington campus will be sold

Bard College at Simon's Rock announced it is closing after the spring semester and relocating its programs to a new campus at Bard in Annandale-On-Hudson, N.Y.