

# What Happened to Frostburg?: Student Organizations, Staff, and Alumni Reflect on the downfall of Campus Culture post COVID-19



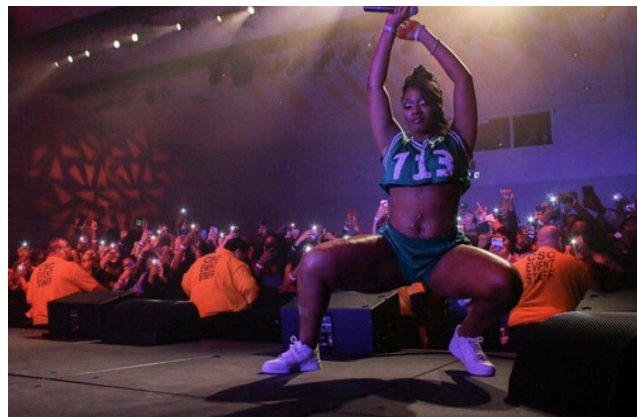
In under 10 years Frostburg State University has transformed completely—the once dubbed “Party School” seeming more and more like a ghost town with each semester that passes. Read along to hear the perspectives of Student Organizations and Alumni.

By Cierra Evans | May 11, 2025

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On November 1st, 2019, Frostburg State University’s ARMAH was packed to the brim.

Students stood knee-to-knee, and the energy was lively as Megan Thee Stallion took the stage. Videos capturing the crowd's excitement and energy bouncing off the walls. Students rapped word-for-word in the crowd, while others were selected from the crowd to come on stage with her. *(Pictured: Megan Thee Stallion Performing at Lane Center in 2019)*



This moment of community was a huge thing for Frostburg, having a celebrity like Megan visit the mountain made *many* students feel proud to rep the university, but not for long.

It's an understatement to say that in Fall 2019, Frostburg roared—The University hosted Late at Lanes or After Darks monthly, you couldn't walk down Bowery or Wood Street without passing several house parties, and during the week? The campus was raging with personality, organizations preparing for sold-out events. (Pictured: Late at Lane Staff with Megan Thee Stallion in 2019)



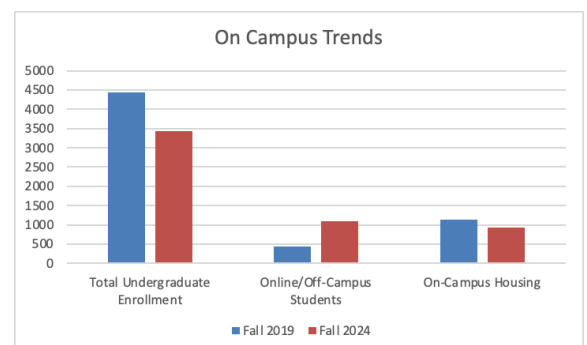
Now nearly 6 years later in Spring 2025, you might find ARMAH lit up for an event or performance, only to find the lights shining on empty seats paired with introverted energy from the few who do attend.

Performances from big artists like Megan Thee Stallion stopped due to lack of funding, UPC halted After Dark events altogether due to lack of turnout, and student-led events quietly faded away due to a combination of lack of funding, and lack of support from students themselves, causing organization leaders to experience burnout.. The sad reality for Frostburg today is an imbalance—on one end passion is found in the leaders of student organizations, but not found in students themselves.

What happens as a result of this lack? Students leave.

## The Numbers Behind the Drops

According to institutional data from “Frostburg State University Trends In Undergraduate Enrollment” for academic years ranging from 2019 to 2024, Frostburg's campus has lost the presence of over 1,000 students in just the span of five years, which for a school that has



always been smaller, is a big difference. (Pictured: Graph of Trends)

In Fall 2019, Frostburg had 4,429 undergraduate students. By Fall 2024, that number had dropped to 3,422—Keep in mind: 1,100 of that 3,422 are fully online or studying at off-campus sites.

Where 1,142 students lived on campus in 2019, only 931 do today. Although there is no data to account for the students in 2019 who lived in neighborhoods surrounding the campus, the number could likely be significantly increased as well.

In just five years, Frostburg has lost a significant amount of students. But the numbers only tell part of the story. What's harder to define is the hit campus life took right to the core—the rapid heartbeat of student involvement that once made Frostburg's reputation what it was, now fading out. The once dubbed “Party School” that was riddled with back-to-back sold-out events, full classes, and a packed campus, now struggling to keep campus life afloat.

## **“Students just don’t care” A word from Residence Life**



Residence Life in 2013, very packed compared to now. (Source: Flickr)

In the residence halls this stagnance is not only reflected, but rather consistent since 2022.

Jordan Lewis, a senior who began working as a Resident Assistant in Fall 2022 and has served in both Frostburg's Frost and Diehl Hall, says the difficulties with students engaging have remained consistent each semester.

"Honestly? My experience hasn't really changed since I started" Lewis explained. "Many students here at Frostburg are prone to being shy and staying in their own bubble... to this day it is very hard to get them out of said bubble and into your events."

"The most challenging part about getting my residents involved is they just don't want to do anything," Lewis says. "Unless it's a party, some students just really won't go. You could have a gaming night or a cooking night, and they still won't."

He sums up the challenges with a familiar metaphor: "You can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make it drink."

Lewis stated in addition to disinterest, other students avoid their RAs out of fear or misunderstanding. "A lot of residents usually avoid me just because I'm an RA. That makes it even harder. But when they eventually talk to me, they realize I'm not there to watch them all the time or try to get them in trouble—I'm there as a resource for them to thrive."

"Alumni say when they come here it just feels so dry. Before COVID, everybody used to go to events—and they were fun. You'd see more than 20 people there, easily. But now, you can barely scrape five."

Through Residence Life, Lewis has been given multiple opportunities to connect with the students in his halls because the school requires RA's to attempt despite the state of the campus life. "They require us to do at least two events," he says. "Even if people don't come, we're still expected to try."

Thankfully, the department has increased RA budgets while providing better tools to promote like flyers and using Instagram. But Lewis feels the problem isn't just money or advertising, but *it's the lacking culture of the campus itself.*

"When you're just going against each other and trying to be first at everything, it makes it harder for this campus to come together. There's always this 'who's better' thing. But if orgs collaborated more, worked together, then events would be better, and more students would show up."

In his view, the problem is beyond Residence Life. It's baked into the way student organizations relate to one another.



Lewis leaves on a statement urging those to take accountability, explaining “Organizations need to be more cooperative. A lot of people here don’t know how to plan events together, and they’re afraid to share the glory. Everyone wants to be the first and BEST to do something, there is no community.”

Some would argue that Frostburg’s decline hit its financial peak in 2024, when headlines across local media read: “Frostburg State is Facing a Multimillion-Dollar Deficit.” Ironically enough, President Nowaczyk had predicted a rebound in enrollment just a year before in September 2023... Nowaczyk stated “From all indications, we are going to see a significant increase in our first-year class” (Cumberland Times-News, 2023) And while many were anticipating a big class of Freshmen, It didn’t make a difference.

## Frostburg Post Covid-19

Many students and alumni point to COVID-19 as the beginning of the downfall, and rightfully so:

“COVID had a *huge* impact on my college experience... Everyone went home, classes were online” said Taylor Carroll, a 2023 graduate and President of Paparazzi Perfect. “When we came back, Frostburg looked like a ghost town. It wasn’t the same after that.”

Carroll, who first attended Frostburg during its “Party School” era in Fall 2018, said the change was significant by the time she graduated in Spring 2023: “All school events were sold out when I got here. By my senior year, all of that stopped. Now, when I come back to help my old organization, it’s even worse... it’s like nobody shows out anymore.”

Stefan Siewe—another class of 2023 graduate and president of Creative Minds from 2020 - 2023, shared a similar sentiment: “COVID just reinforced anti-social attitudes,” he said. “Students were inside for so long that they forgot how to be in a social environment. It made them more introverted.”

Siewe noted that Creative Mind’s efforts as a board weren’t enough. “We could make flyers, we could promote, we could do **everything** right, but it didn’t change anything because students were just not showing up anymore.”

Frostburg’s culture was built on the passion of deeply involved student leaders who had a strong regard for the success of their organization’s purposes—majority of whom graduated by 2023 like Siewe and Carroll.

What replaced them was **not** a new wave of engaged freshmen, but the complete opposite: a distant student population who at most, just care about when the next party is.

## **The struggle for student organizations to stay afloat**

For the boards of many student organizations—African Student Association, Paparazzi Perfect Modeling, and The Strutters Dance Team to list a few—there is a lack of excitement for the members because of the campus responses, the only thing holding together is the mutual passion: culture, dance, and modeling. A passion all groups would agree are being delivered to an undeserving student body.

“It’s been a difficult experience,” said President of Paparazzi Perfect Taliah Mott, “Fundraising is way harder with fewer students on campus. Events feel emptier than before and It’s discouraging for the models when crowds don’t show up for something we’ve spent a whole academic year crafting” She admits.

“I joined this team my freshman year in Fall 2021, and my first two shows were sold out despite COVID because the presence of pre-covid students still existed. But since most of them graduated in 2023, you have to fight to get people to even consider, and things are more so a popularity contest than showing true support.”

Newly elected Paparazzi President for the upcoming academic year Xavier Green added “It’s hurtful for our girls too, they’re all freshmen and they work so hard only to open up YikYak (An anonymous app for college students to share thoughts) and be belittled... for what? Paparazzi’s Legacy spans 18 years, we’re struggling to uphold it and all we wanna do is make the alumni proud.” An unfortunate truth.

“We’ve struggled to maintain our members. Most of our vets have graduated, so we had to start from scratch with freshmen. All I can hope is the new girls don’t transfer like others have, and that Xavier has good luck next semester.”

But even as they try to rebuild, support is slim. Green added “A show in ARMAH can cost nearly \$4,000. SGA might give you \$1,000 if you plead your case, but how are we supposed to make the campus fun if the students aren’t seeing it? A sold out show is 300 people, we barely get 150.” A question we may not ever have the answer to.

## **“I Question If It’s Even Worth It”: ASA Speaks**

The African Student Association (ASA) shares the same frustration as Paparazzi Perfect

“Our board burns the midnight oil to do a lot for our organization, and it hurts to see that students don’t appreciate our hard work,” said Mariama Drammeh, ASA’s event coordinator. “It affects my self-esteem. Board members burn out and even second guess if it’s worth it.”

ASA’s purpose is inclusion and the spread of African culture, bringing in students of all backgrounds to learn beyond the stereotypes. But they are met with silence or mockery.

“One of our events got made fun of on YikYak” Another experience an org has faced with the app many students would argue is harmful as it opens up organizations to cyberbullying and hate speech. Each organization has been spoken about negatively on this platform, but because of the anonymity, it doesn’t seem to be coming to a stop.

Drammeh adds “It just makes you question people’s integrity. The attendance was already low and we’re putting energy into something meaningful to us, yet the result is someone’s attempt at embarrassment, even worse, someone who attended and still had something to say.”

Drammeh even recounts a moment unrelated to any of the student organizations, but a powerful analogy nonetheless. In Fall 2024, controversial guest speakers arrived on campus, sparking outrage among campus members and other organizations

She, and multiple other students ask the same question: “If this group shouted slurs, disrespected the Holy Quran, and called a student a derogatory name—Why are we allowing people to alienate our students even further? Is this really the example we want for our campus?” Another question that *may never be answered*.

## **The Strutters Dance Team**

Even organizations like the Strutters Dance Team that originated in 2014, once a staple of Frostburg’s performance culture, are struggling in and out.

“Recruitment is hard... Freshmen don’t explore the campus anymore,” said Secretary Rachel Dashiell, “Events get inconsistent crowds—either nobody comes or we get filmed and mocked on YikYak.” A trend that seems to be consistent on Frostburgs campus.

The organization's Internal structure has also shifted. "Our 2023-24 President was a mentor and taught me to self-reflect on when things could be better if people were talking online. But the 2024-25 President struggled with this, making everyone stressed."

This internal instability affected their reputation and fueled the chatter. "There's a decline in prioritizing fundamentals like precision and energy because it feels like people will point and laugh either way despite the hard work. It shatters our sisterhood"

So, what keeps them going? "Love of dance. It's the only outlet left." says Dashiell

## **It's not just Frostburg: Frostburg's Registrar speaks out**

"Declining enrollment across the higher education landscape is a reality that we must adapt to and address" says Chelsey Tressler who stepped into the role of University Registrar in April 2025.

Despite her short time at Frostburg, her decade of experience speaks for itself. "I believe a multitude of factors that are not directly within the control of institutions play a major role in the decline of student enrollment—economy, perception of the economy, population trends, job market, etc." Says Tressler, offering a wider perspective—this problem is not just exclusive to Frostburg, but more so, ALL universities have felt the shift. Frostburg just feels it greater.

She shares the cause "Declining enrollment presents challenges for drafting an efficient and effective master schedule." And what's the effect? "Fewer students to fill sections, combined with fewer faculty to instruct multiple sections, requires a leaner schedule that may not provide robust offerings for students, or the ideal daily schedule."

Tressler managed to make the conversation uplifting, sharing different ways that the Registrar's Office plans to help students navigate the current climate. "Our office works by providing tools to students for their planning and scheduling needs. College Scheduler allows students to plan future semesters of coursework prior to scheduling. The online registration portal provides remote registration 24/7 for convenience."

Despite this, Tressler is optimistic because of Frostburg's benefits: "Frostburg offers competitive tuition, a community-oriented culture, and a beautiful campus with a wide range of extracurricular offerings," She affirms. In a time where multiple universities are fighting not just for enrollment but for overall relevance, the resources her office provides could be the



foundation to aid student life—if the university can find new ways to reach and retain the students who need it most, maybe less will transfer or drop out.

## **The Student Government Weighs In**

“We cannot forget the implications that [COVID-19] had on everyone’s mental health and lack of physical interaction with others.” Says Hailey Unger, SGA Vice President and soon to be graduate.

She continues “Over the past couple years, we have seen a large dip and lack of interest in student enrollment and engagement.” (As the numbers mentioned earlier do certainly reflect the large dip...)

“There are so many signs that lead many of us to believe that it has much to do with the pandemic and the way our generation was forced to adapt... We were used to staying inside and learning asynchronously... coming to college after an experience like that is difficult.”

Unger also recognizes that times change, especially when a pandemic is in the picture. “What worked 10 years ago isn’t going to work now... the university expects student orgs to know how to plan events in a world getting used to being social again, yet gets upset with them when they don’t know the rules.”

To Unger, the heart of the problem lies in how disconnected the university has become, stating “Leadership changes every few years—we need to be adaptable in giving the students the resources they need.”

She finishes with a short but strong sentiment: “Students go to universities for experiences. Only a student can convey that experience.”

## **An Uphill Battle for Student Engagement: UPC Speaks Out**

Student Engagement Program Coordinator for the University Programming Council (UPC) Kristina Thompson’s views are similar to Ungers; however, she offers a dual perspective as both a staff member and a first year student when COVID-19 hit America in 2020.

Thompson confidently believes the pandemic is responsible for Frostburg's challenges. "I have the perspective of being a student whose campus had to adhere to COVID protocols and guidelines—and it's true... no students wanted to or could interact with each other because of the pandemic, Frostburg took a big hit as a result."

She adds that being a staff member has further revealed to her how greatly attendance numbers had dropped, and how the dropping numbers are reflected in UPC's budget. "Our budget comes from student activity fees that are a part of tuition. Since COVID, enrollment has dropped so much that our budget has been directly affected."

Since graduating in 2023 however, Thompson has witnessed a slow and steady increase in student participation in her position. She states "There's always a diverse group at our events, and thankfully we have dedicated attendees who are always supporting which helps."

Despite the budget being impacted, there's hope. "It's been a battle, but we're slowly seeing more students commit and enroll." She explains her efforts to engage students, like tabling along with her supervisor during Bobcat Bound, a day for future students to explore the campus and learn about what it has to offer. "We're trying to hook students early," she says.

UPC tries to appeal to what students want through asking for feedback on events along with providing incentives to them like free food, free make and take items, and raffles with PS5's or Nintendo Switches.

Despite the attempts, the department still faces a tough response. "Students have said we need to market more—but if we *already* post on social media, use digital signage, hang flyers in the dorms and educational buildings along with emails, there's not that much we can do," She admits.

"At some point, it becomes a question of whether students are really paying attention." A perspective that reflects the views of the student organizations.

Thompson offers a realistic but promising perspective: "We get good engagement but it could be way better." She says "We're not thriving, but we're not hurting. If the university had steady enrollment numbers, then maybe we would thrive, but until then, UPC will always have to work twice as hard to get students involved."

## So, Can Frostburg be revived?

It's hard to say.

When asked what more support would look like, Drammeh said: "I would cry tears of joy if we had enough to make real events happen. I want ASA to have our own dance and modeling teams again. More weekly meetings... Trips to HBCUs. A space where ASA feels like home."

It's not impossible. But it will take more than one generation of student leaders to fix what's been hindered.

"Honestly in many ways, the students at Frostburg *ARE* the culture. I mean, what else is there to do besides building community amongst each other?" said Siewe, "And to be quite honest... the "culture" seems to be on life support."

What happens next for Frostburg State University not only depends on the administration's attempts at outreach and raising funding to host more fun, engaging events—but it also depends completely on the students themselves.

When you bring the shared experiences of all of these individuals together, a common theme is revealed—the lack of engagement turned into a manifestation of negativity, of discomfort with interacting, and a lack of camaraderie.

Perhaps the key to success isn't highlighting just the administration's lack of effort—but critiquing the community as a whole, actions like banning YikYak, creating more campus spaces for students to be seen without spending thousands, and overall giving more support to one another is a great start that many Alumni and student leaders can only *hope* will happen once they're all gone.

## A Final Word From Yours Truly.

I, Cierra Evans, am not just the writer of this piece; I am a witness of the transformation Frostburg has endured, hence my passion on the topic.

If there's one thing I've learned while crafting all 10 interviews for this report that I didn't know before: Accountability is a crucial and necessary quality for growth to happen—not just from our administration, *but from one another*.

Change comes from within. it won't happen until we are all leading with integrity throughout our time on this mountain.

Frostburg **can** be revived: but only if we all reflect and uplift each other throughout the shifts.

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### **Special Thanks to the Interviewees:**

1. **Taylor Carroll** – Class of 2023 / Pre-COVID Alum / Fall 22 - Spring 23 Paparazzi Perfect President
2. **Taliah Mott** – Class of 2025 / Fall 23 - Spring 25 Paparazzi Perfect President
3. **Xavier Green** – Class of 2026 / Elected 25 - 26 Paparazzi Perfect President
4. **Mariama Drammeh** – Class of 2025 / ASA Fall 24 - Spring 25 Event Coordinator
5. **Rachel Dashiell** – Class of 2026 / The Strutters Fall 24 - Spring 25 Secretary
6. **Stefan Siewe** – Class of 2023 / Pre-COVID Alum / Former Creative Minds President
7. **Hailey Unger** – Class of 2025 / Vice President of SGA
8. **Jordan Lewis** - Class of 2025 / Resident Assistant Fall 22 - Spring 25
9. **Kristina Thompson** - Class of 2023 / Student Engagement Program Coordinator
10. **Chelsey Tressler** – University Registrar