On The Closure Of The Academy Of Natural Sciences Of Drexel University

2026-09-11

Table of contents

1 Background 3

2 Economics 4

3 Protesting 6

3.1 Letter As An Individual 6

3.2 Letter With An Organization 7

4 Will ANS Actually Close? 8

5 Conclusion 9



Figure 1: Amidst the pillars near an entrance to the Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University, an ammonite lays resolute, etched in stone.

This is a link post for: https://paleozone.substack.com/p/on-the-closure-of-the-academy-of.

1 Background

The former Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia (now, *ANS of Drexel University*) (henceforth abbreviated ANS), a museum which facilitated, among other things, the first description and mounting of a dinosaur (*Hadrosaurus foulki* of Haddonfield, NJ) in North America, is set to forevermore close on September 30th, 2026, after 214 years of operation and 198 years of being open as a museum.

At present time, 17 days remain until ANS's closure. Only the public-facing portions of the museum were originally set to close while the private collections, consisting of over 19 million specimens, were set to remain accessible to researchers. However, recent updates (obtained via personal communication) indicate that the entirety of the museum displays and collections will very likely be relocated and the original, historic building sold.

2 Economics

The exact relationship between Drexel University and ANS is complicated, as are the economics of the museum's operations. The Academy's FY2025 statements and Drexel University's consolidated FY2025 statements, both audited by PricewaterhouseCoopers and issued on 28 October 2025, contain copious information on the balance of funds at ANS.

This information is from last year and hence might not generalize well, but it is the best available. The calculations below ought to be considered as ballpark estimates or "napkin math" at best. [1]

To make calculations on how much the public would have to raise to "save the academy" (on a purely financial basis, as this does not take into account bureaucratic bottlenecks), either through visitations or through donations, we first need to define some variables (the values here come from the audit, save for the best annual ANS attendance on record, which comes from this 6abc Philadelphia (WPVI) article):

$S = \$8{,}288{,}000$	Drexel's annual operating subsidy to the Academy
$X = \$23{,}007{,}000$	Total operating expenses
$R_e = \$2{,}037{,}000$	Earned revenue (from the public's payments)
$\kappa = \$22$	Adult admission price per visitor
$V_{\text{peak}} = 300{,}000$	Best annual attendance on record

With these defined, we can proceed.

$$\begin{aligned}\Gamma_{\text{gap}} &= X - R_e \\ &= 23{,}007{,}000 - 2{,}037{,}000 \\ &= 20{,}970{,}000\end{aligned}$$

The above is the annual gap in funding the museum cannot itself cover.

$$\frac{S}{\Gamma_{\text{gap}}} = \frac{8{,}288{,}000}{20{,}970{,}000} \approx 0.395$$

The above is the fraction of the annual gap in funding the museum cannot itself cover that Drexel University has been covering.

$$\begin{aligned}V_S &= S/\kappa \approx 377{,}000 \\ V_{\text{gap}} &= \Gamma_{\text{gap}}/\kappa \approx 953{,}000\end{aligned}$$

The above illustrates, respectively, that what Drexel University has been covering is equivalent in price to an additional 377 thousand annual visitors and that the funding gap in full — that

[1] I intend to make a fuller analysis than the one below available on GitHub here (pending).

is, if Drexel University contributed nothing — is equivalent in price to admitting 953 thousand visitors annually.

$$V_{\text{gap}}/V_{\text{peak}} \approx 3.18$$

$$\boxed{\Gamma_{\text{gap}} = \$20{,}970{,}000 \text{ a year} \qquad V_{\text{gap}} \approx 3.18 \cdot V_{\text{peak}}}$$

In sum, *if there was no allowance for grants, gifts, or endowment income*, then ANS would have to find $20.97 million per year in income. To cover with visitations from the public at $22 per admission, there would have to 953 thousand visitors, which is 3.18 times the peak number of annual ANS visitors on record.

Instead supposing that 2025-levels of grants, gifts, or endowment income *are* taken into account, we define:

$$\begin{aligned} D &= \$4{,}221{,}000 && \text{Endowment draw appropriated for operations} \\ G &= \$7{,}856{,}000 && \text{Grants, contributions, other and investment income} \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} D + G &= 4{,}221{,}000 + 7{,}856{,}000 \\ &= 12{,}077{,}000 \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \Gamma &= \Gamma_{\text{gap}} - (D + G) \\ &= 20{,}970{,}000 - 12{,}077{,}000 \\ &= 8{,}893{,}000 \end{aligned}$$

The above illustrates that the gap in funds for ANS lessens from $20.97 million to $8.893 million, if we allow for grants, gifts, or endowment income.

The headline finding here is that ***with the same mixture of grants, gifts, and endowment income as in 2025, there would need to be 497000 visitors to ANS annually with a ticket price of $22 for ANS to break even***. Of course, the price of a ticket may also be modified and private donations could also make a difference. More expensive tickets are less likely to bring in more people, though, and to attain annually >497000 visitors seems very unlikely!

3 Protesting

At this point, complete operational cessation seems quite certain, yet the public, who were donning the countenances of those viewing a tragedy and dampening their awe-laden remarks with sadness[1], is justifiably upset with the prospect of losing another outlet for the contemplation and appreciation of Nature and her beauty.

On September 8th, several hundred protestors gathered to make known their frustrations and dismay, and a number of petitions, including this one on change.org, have garnered signatures, some as much as 4300.

In addition to protesting with their names and demonstrations, some have sent letters of concern to Drexel University's President and or to the City of Philadelphia. The organization Save The Academy has spearheaded this and has prepared a 10-step protocol for the public to participate in ameliorating the situation.

Find below two letters, one personal and one as part of an institution I belong to, that I drafted for Save The Academy.

3.1 Letter As An Individual

"Scientific progress is one essential key to our security as a nation, to our better health, to more jobs, to a higher standard of living, and to our cultural progress."

(Vannevar Bush, from *Science, the Endless Frontier*, 1945.)

"We've arranged a global civilization in which most crucial elements profoundly depend on science and technology. We have also arranged things so that almost no one understands science and technology. This is a prescription for disaster."

(Carl Sagan, from *The Demon-Haunted World*, 1995.)

Undercurrents of strife and uncertainty abound across social, cultural, and political strata in the present day. The People, numerous and diverse as they are, have, to a large degree, lost faith in the ardor, corrigibility, fairness, and stability of their governments and institutions.

The proposed closing of ANS — one of the oldest institutions in the USA and a pioneer of the natural sciences, with its first mounted and described North American dinosaurs and its journal — has been shocking to a great many people. These individuals need not simply be the locals of Philadelphia; the full gamut of those who have cultivated any shred of interest in the natural history and future of our Universe are likewise affected.

[1] My visitation the week prior was unfortunately my first and presumably last visit (to the public section of the museum, at least). During this excursion, my wife and I had a lovely conversation with an entomologist who works in the ANSP collections with researchers from around the world, including some quite young and outlandishly fastidious in their research, along with students from Drexel University. Inevitably, the conversation eventually oriented itself towards the tumult of the day, particularly as concerns AI, and I was fascinated to learn how entomology was being affected by AI. The gist, from what I could gather, is that there has been some reconciliation of systematics in entomology as a consequence and there is also a reliance on these tools for initial identification, after which the researcher narrows down the possibilities on his/her own.

ANS stands as a beacon of light amidst the darkness of ignorance and superstition, as a reprieve from the din and routine toils embedded in modernity, and as a vector of forethought and stewardship for the future in a climate of shortsightedness and impulse. There are millions of specimens for the world to see and ponder, and generations of children would be poorer without ANS as an outlet for their curiosity.

To lose the connection between ANS and the public — for ANS to close its doors — would be but one more lash against the back of a tired public, who have had in various manners their attention, health, and livelihoods hollowed out, and would make for a mighty poor reflection of the values now held by Drexel University and by the City of Philadelphia.

With these remarks, I humbly beseech you, President Antonio Merlo and the City of Philadelphia, to summon collectively the necessary Will to reverse course on the closing of ANS and to thereby produce a better future, however hard doing this may be and however tough the cost-reckonings.

3.2 Letter With An Organization

(with one element from the previous letter reincorporated)

We the undersigned members of ORGANIZATION and associates believe that the closing of ANS would be a disaster for public education and scientific research. Drexel University and the Academy of Natural Sciences (ANS) administration were entrusted with the stewardship of an icon of American science, especially with respect to paleontology. It is a historical gem which cannot be replaced. To deny the public access to this institution is criminal and a desertion of duty.

Moreover, it is a betrayal of the public's trust, especially given that there was scant forewarning of this decision to allow time for raising the necessary funds to perpetuate ANS.

Our fervent hope is that Drexel University and the ANS administration will seriously reconsider their decision to shut down this beacon of light amidst the darkness of ignorance and superstition. If not reversed, this decision will go down in infamy in the annals of American science.

4 Will ANS Actually Close?

To help quantify some of the uncertainty with respect to whether ANSP will remain closed "permanently", I propose and forecast on the following question:

Will the Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University have accepted admissions from the public on over 7 days in 2027? (resolving on 31 December 2027)

As a rough forecast, I put forth a probability of 8%.

5 Conclusion

Shutting down ANS would de-burden administrative staff of major financial woes (and of maintenance and management stress) and is therefore to them an extremely attractive option (and one that is exceedingly difficult to reverse course) .

However, in the case of a museum of firsts and with such historicity, the disgrace and shame garnered by administrators and by the City of Philadelphia for being the ones who failed in their stewardship may eventually be sufficient for some change to occur, be it the erection of a small installation under the same name.

In the optimistic case, the entirety of the ANS public-facing component will be resurrected (presumably after some hurried medley of action from private donors and government). If we are truly at the end of ANS, this is a tragedy for the American public and the natural sciences.