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Office of the President

Letter on Single-Gender Social Organizations

May 6, 2016

CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

Dear Dean Khurana:

Thank you for [your recommendations](#) concerning unrecognized single-gender social organizations, including the final clubs (male and female), fraternities, and sororities. I very much appreciate your thoughtful work, together with that of others in the College, and write now to convey my acceptance of the recommendations.

Throughout its history, Harvard has worked to broaden its educational reach, to enhance the effectiveness of its teaching, and to ensure that its students are prepared for the diverse world into which they will graduate. We undertake this work purposefully, as part of our commitment to self-examination, reassessment, adaptation, and innovation. Tradition is important, especially to an institution with our long reach into the past, but we must measure it against the contemporary needs of a dynamic, modern academic community.

Over time, Harvard has transformed its undergraduate student body as it has welcomed women, minorities, international students, and students of limited financial means as an increasing proportion of its population. But campus culture has not changed as rapidly as student demography. In recent months, we have been forcefully reminded that diversity is not equivalent to inclusion and belonging, and we have rededicated ourselves to achieving a campus where all members fully belong and thrive. For us to make progress on this shared endeavor, we must address deeply rooted gender attitudes, and the related issues of sexual misconduct, points underscored by the work of the Task Force on the Prevention of Sexual Assault.

As noted in your report, these realities have informed the College's recommendations. They are also central to my decision to accept them. A truly inclusive community requires that students have the opportunity to participate in the life of the campus free from exclusion on arbitrary grounds. Although the fraternities, sororities, and final clubs are not formally recognized by the College, they play an unmistakable and growing role in student life, in many cases enacting forms of privilege and exclusion at odds with our deepest values. The College cannot ignore these organizations if it is to advance our shared commitment to broadening opportunity and making Harvard a campus for all of its students. Nor can it endorse selection criteria that reject much of the student body merely because of gender. As reflected by the University's decision to withdraw recognition of the male final clubs in 1984, those practices are inconsistent with the educational environment the College seeks to create. They encourage a form of self-segregation that undermines the promise offered by Harvard's diverse student body. And they do not serve our students well when they step outside our gates into a society where gender-based discrimination is understood as unwise, unenlightened, and untenable.

I join you in urging the unrecognized social organizations to discard their gender-based membership practices, to adopt an open application process, and to establish greater overall transparency. I recognize, however, that not all the

organizations will accept our call for reform and that some Harvard College students will still seek membership in those organizations.

I agree with the judgment that, at this time, the College should not adopt a rule prohibiting students from joining unrecognized social organizations that retain discriminatory membership policies. Students will decide for themselves whether to engage with these organizations, as members or otherwise. But just as students have choice, so too the College must determine for itself the structure of activities that it funds or endorses (including through fellowship recommendations from the dean), or that otherwise occur under its auspices. Captains of intercollegiate sports teams and leaders of organizations funded, sponsored, or recognized by Harvard College in a very real sense represent the College. They benefit from its resources. They operate under its name. Especially as it seeks to break down structural barriers to an effectively inclusive campus, the College is right to ensure that the areas in which it provides resources and endorsement advance and reinforce its values of non-discrimination.

As your recommendations acknowledge, it will be important for the College to monitor the changing relationship between the single-gender social organizations and our students. I am mindful in particular about concerns that unsupervised social spaces can present for sexual misconduct and alcohol abuse. I ask that you report to me, at the end of each of the next three academic years, about the College's assessment of the role the single-gender social organizations are playing in College life and whether the College should be considering any further action to advance our core institutional values.

Culture change is not easy, and members of our community will inevitably disagree about how to move forward. No action is likely to prove a perfect solution to the complex array of issues of gender equity, equality of student access to powerful social resources, student choice, and other factors, including the well-being of our students, that are at play here. But we have as our touchstone an educational experience in which students of all backgrounds come together, learn

from each other, and enjoy the transformational possibilities presented by sustained exposure to difference. By reinforcing core principles of non-discrimination and inclusion, the recommendations of the College represent an important next step in our ongoing progress toward that goal.

Sincerely,
Drew Gilpin Faust

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