

HARVARD COLLEGE



May 6, 2016

Dear President Faust,

I write today to convey the College's recommendations for addressing the problems created for our community by the discriminatory membership policies of undergraduate unrecognized single-gender social organizations, including Final Clubs.

Harvard has a long and complex history of grappling with gender discrimination, dating back to before Radcliffe was chartered by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1894 and stretching into the present, when Harvard has resolutely taken steps to remove the antiquated barriers to women's full participation in the University's academic and extracurricular opportunities. In every era, change has come slowly and often with fierce opposition. Even in recent decades, as our community has undergone a dramatic and positive transformation, the unrecognized single-gender social organizations have lagged behind in ways that are untenable in the 21st century. At a time when Harvard is preparing citizens and citizen-leaders to bring people together and embrace an increasingly diverse and interconnected world, these organizations contribute to a social life and a student culture that for many on our campus is disempowering and exclusionary.

In the 1970s, as Harvard opened many opportunities to women, Harvard College objected to the discriminatory practices of the undergraduate male Final Clubs on the basis that gender-based exclusion would undermine the intellectual and social environment of the College. In 1984, the male Final Clubs chose to maintain their discriminatory practices, which led to the College's decision to no longer recognize them as part of Harvard's community. At that time, the College hoped that cutting ties with these organizations would either lead them to become gender inclusive or stem their impact on the student culture and social life at the College. Instead, in what has been described as an effort to counter the male dominated dynamics of Harvard's social scene, more unrecognized single-gender social organizations have emerged. Ultimately, all of these unrecognized single-gender social organizations are at odds with Harvard College's educational philosophy and its commitment to a diverse living and learning experience.

Discrimination is pernicious. Stereotypes and bias take hold, normalizing in a community behavior, which should be unacceptable. In this case, the discriminatory membership policies of these organizations have led to the perpetuation of spaces that are rife with power imbalances. The most entrenched of these spaces send an

unambiguous message that they are the exclusive preserves of men. In their recruitment practices and through their extensive resources and access to networks of power, these organizations propagate exclusionary values that undermine those of the larger Harvard College community. And while the history of these organizations is similar to those at some of our peer institutions, organizations on all of those campuses began to admit women decades ago, rendering the situation at Harvard not just untenable, but also uniquely anachronistic.

Although they are private organizations, these unrecognized single-gender social organizations are comprised principally, if not exclusively, of Harvard College students and undermine Harvard's campus culture. At the same time, their fundamental principles are antithetical to our institutional values. Harvard has the obligation to establish the general regulations and standards governing Harvard students, faculty, and staff that are consistent with our educational philosophy. As importantly, the College must ensure that when it permits its resources to be expended, when it allows its name to be used, and when it endorses the actions of its students, it does so in a way that is consonant with its core value of non-discrimination and of fostering a diverse community where students are educated through experiences with individuals of different genders, gender identity, sexual orientation, and racial and ethnic background, among other attributes.

With these factors in mind, the College respectfully submits the following recommendations:

1. For students matriculating in the fall of 2017 and thereafter: any such students who become members of unrecognized single-gender social organizations will not be eligible to hold leadership positions in recognized student organizations or athletic teams. Currently enrolled students and those who are matriculating in the fall of 2016 will be exempt from these new policies.
2. For students matriculating in the fall of 2017 and thereafter: any such students who become members of unrecognized single-gender social organizations will not be eligible to receive the Dean's endorsement letters for those fellowships that require such endorsements. Currently enrolled students and those matriculating in the fall of 2016 will be exempt from these new policies.
3. Procedures for implementing these new policies will be developed by an advisory group comprised of faculty, students, and administrators at the College.
4. The College will work with those currently unrecognized single-gender social organizations transitioning to gender inclusive and open membership to identify opportunities to engage and support their positive functions of providing more inclusive social events, student leadership experiences and professional mentoring opportunities for their members.

- In all these cases, support may include access to and use of certain Harvard facilities, among other possibilities to be determined by the advisory group. The College will also continue to create and invest in programs to support gender equity on campus through existing organizations and centers.
5. The College will continue to invest in social alternatives and increase its social programming budgets for the Freshman Dean's Office, House Life, and the Office of Student Life (programming budgets for these areas have already increased 73% over the past two years, and are expected to increase an additional 15% in the next academic year). These investments will allow students, working closely with Faculty Deans, Resident and Assistant Deans, and administrators, to reimagine their social options while reinforcing community values of inclusion.
 6. These policies and other associated issues will be monitored regularly and formally reviewed three years after taking effect to assess whether additional steps should be considered and implemented.

These new policies will not prevent undergraduates from choosing their own paths while at Harvard. They are not designed to regulate the internal affairs of the unrecognized social organizations; the organizations retain the authority to set their membership criteria, even as the College will continue to urge them to adopt inclusive and non-discriminatory policies. Likewise, students will be able to continue to join these organizations and remain in good academic standing with the College. The recommendations are instead focused exclusively on decisions belonging to the College about what it funds, sponsors, endorses or otherwise operates under its name.


The College developed these recommendations with careful deliberation. Over the past two years, we have engaged with students, including those who are members of unrecognized single-gender social organizations and those who are not; with our alumni, including members of these organizations and non-members; with faculty; and with administrative staff, including those involved with extracurricular activities on campus. We also carefully considered analyses on the impact of gender exclusionary practices on our campus climate, including The Final Report of the Task Force on the Prevention of Sexual Assault, 2015; Report of the Committee on Social Clubs, 2007; The Final Clubs, 1998; Report on the Final Clubs, 1997.

In making these recommendations, the College recognizes that for many stakeholders – current club members, club alumni, students in unrecognized fraternities and sororities, and the University community more broadly – these organizations have provided a place of comfort and identity. We have heard heartfelt statements from students about the benefits they have experienced by belonging to a Final Club, fraternity or sorority, and we are not questioning their experiences.

But we do expect leaders of our athletic teams, our recognized student groups, and those seeking a Dean's endorsement to share in the College's responsibility of fostering a non-discriminatory culture at Harvard.

Moments of institutional change are sometimes accompanied by a sense of loss and fear, but they are also crucial turning points for growth and renewal. Harvard faced criticism when Radcliffe College was created, when Harvard College first awarded degrees to women, and when the two Colleges were merged. Yet few current members of the Harvard community would choose to return to the policies and practices in place prior to those reforms. Today, we have reached another crossroads, and it is time to move Harvard College forward by fostering a campus culture that respects the dignity and rights of all our students. Previous generations of Harvard students have risen to overcome the challenges posed by exclusionary practices to create a better Harvard for our current students. I am confident that our current students will use this moment to do the same for the College's future generations.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rakesh Khurana', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Rakesh Khurana
Danoff Dean of Harvard College