

November 7, 2017 Faculty Meeting

TAD Remarks

I am not accustomed to speaking in a faculty meeting, but this topic seems too important on which to take a pass. I respectfully speak against Professor Lewis's motion.

I recognize the shifting rationale in this conversation (from sexual assault to gender discrimination to exclusivity) and I recognize the two principles (freedom of association and freedom from oppressive social hierarchies). Both principles are important. But creating an even playing field – where the question now is not about talent, but social connections – trumps, in my mind, any issue of free association.

I know what I am talking about. When I was an undergraduate at Harvard, I was a member of a final club. We have been living next door to a club for 13 years, and I have served for a long time on the Administrative Board, where we deliberate on cases coming out of the clubs. These are different times. When I was a student, the College was much more homogenous, the clubs were not social centers (in fact, they were pretty much operating at the margins), and no one was particularly impacted by my participation, limited as it was.

As I mentioned last May to members of our 50th reunion class, I hardly mean – in taking the position I have – to be detracting from the warm memories they have, some of which I share, though I would argue that patterns of alcohol abuse were being created during those formative years. The times have simply changed. Changed enough, that had our own daughters applied and been lucky to be accepted, I would have – for all my devotion to this place – had reservations about their attending. Too skewed a social landscape.

Now, with the fierce commitment of our President and Dean to financial aid, and Admissions' aggressive scouring of the globe for the best talent, the College is so much more diverse.

Students accepting our offer of admission should, I believe, feel that they are eligible to participate in all of Harvard. Yet when they see students in their black ties and black dresses – sometimes headed to limousines – pass their peers coming back with mops and buckets from doing Dorm Crew they have to wonder if Harvard is truly open. That is unfortunate.

I have heard the suggestion that we require clubs, frats, and sororities to open up punching or rushing, but I think the end result would be pretty much the same: the haves and the have nots.

(Last Wednesday I received an email from a sophomore who had been rejected by all five of the clubs he had “punched” while his friends presumably had gotten tickets of their own). I have also heard the suggestion that we leave the clubs alone or bring them under the College's umbrella.

The first situation would continue to find freshman women, the pretty ones and those with social networks, in settings (largely unsupervised) in which they don't belong. The second would lead to a significant staffing increase as reported recently in [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#), a move I cannot believe the faculty would support as they argue for teaching add-ons. And it would likely lead to the need to acquire more space at a time when we are investing heavily, and appropriately, in the renewal of the Houses.

I don't mean at all to be throwing students who have joined “under the bus.” There are lots of great students who are members, and activities that have provided opportunities for leadership and for fostering belonging, especially in the sororities. But not belonging for everyone. Freedom of association is fine but it is not really a free environment as students, for reasons beyond their control, are often excluded from participation.

It is time to recognize the new era, allocate our resources and imagination to promote genuine inclusivity, and to move forward, not get stuck in what one faculty dean said he had heard increasingly from his students is a toxic environment.