

# **Report of the Committee on the Unrecognized Single-Gender Social Organizations (USGSO) July 5, 2017**

## ***1. Introduction***

Harvard College's commitment to non-discrimination, inclusion, and a healthy social climate has guided and animated the work of this Committee. The Faculty has stated clearly its commitment to the value of diversity in the educational experience at Harvard and this Committee's recommendations build upon that commitment. The Committee has reviewed numerous documents, including the *Report of the Implementation Committee for the Policy on Membership in Single Gender Social Organizations*, College reports, College Visiting Committee reports, student data, policies of peer institutions, and op-eds and relevant news coverage. The Committee has engaged in deliberative dialogue about any viable alternatives to the current policy, has invited FAS faculty as well as members of the male final clubs as guests to share their viewpoints with the Committee, and has developed a plan for a consultative process on its preliminary recommendations.<sup>1</sup> While any policy regarding the unrecognized single-gender social organizations (USGSOs) is necessarily aimed at a small population of organizations and students who participate in them, the effects of those organizations permeate the fabric of campus culture.<sup>2</sup> Few students remain untouched by them.

As stated in the Charge of this Committee, "The College adopted, in May 2016, a new policy regarding unrecognized single-gender social organizations (USGSO) with the explicit goal of ending the gender segregation and discrimination of these organizations in a manner that is consistent with our educational mission, non-discrimination principles, and applicable law. For more than 30 years – since Harvard withdrew recognition from the male Final Clubs out of a belief that students should not be excluded from structured campus activities and organizations solely on the basis of their gender – the USGSOs have grown to be an outsized part of student social life. As reflected in survey comments, these organizations directly and negatively influence the undergraduate experience for many students who are not themselves members of these organizations. The discriminatory practices of these organizations undermine our educational mission and the principles espoused by this Faculty and distance their members from their College experience."

The Committee has examined the goals of the current policy, and we have evaluated whether there are more effective means to achieve them. The Committee recognizes the complex issues that surround these organizations, which are at once independent from Harvard University yet play such a dominant role in the fabric of the undergraduate student experience, whether or not any given student is a member.

The acute challenge faced by the College is that these organizations are at odds with the "'long-held and oft expressed view' that student body diversity is essential to

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<sup>1</sup> The Charge of this Committee is reproduced in Appendix 1.

<sup>2</sup> In this document, USGSOs will refer to the list of organizations in Appendix 2, which is based on Appendix E of the *Report of the Implementation Committee for the Policy on Membership in Single Gender Social Organizations*.

Harvard College's pedagogical objectives and institutional mission," a view that was reaffirmed by the Faculty of Arts and Sciences in February 2016.<sup>3</sup> The final clubs in particular were products of their time. Due to their resistance to change over the decades, they have lapsed into products behind their time. Despite repeated attempts to encourage them to reform, there seems to be no simple solution that will bring them into greater accord with the forward-looking aspirations of the University.

As long ago as 1988, a faculty member observed that "the final clubs are where Harvard students learn to discriminate."<sup>4</sup> Such an attitude hardly prepares students for the pluralistic world into which they will graduate.<sup>5</sup> While many current members of these organizations have had the moral courage to advocate for change, they often find themselves at an impasse with graduate members who have little to no appetite for it, perhaps motivated by the desire to keep Harvard the way they remember it. Indeed, the Committee has received communications from alumni, including those who were not members of a USGSO, pointing to their impression that these organizations were hardly noticeable to them. By contrast, the surveys reviewed by this Committee are testimony to the fact that a staggering number of recent students find the USGSOs far from innocuous. This Committee is responding to the recent climate on campus, as well as to the nature of student comments in these surveys. The surveys contain numerous pleas from both male and female students for Harvard to do something about the social organizations because, in their experience, the influence of these organizations on campus life and in shaping mindsets is impossible to escape—even for those who wish to have nothing to do with them.<sup>6</sup>

A year has passed since the announcement of renewed action by the University to address the pernicious influence of these organizations, yet it appears many of them wish to wait it out. Some have even responded with an increased zest for exclusion and gender

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<sup>3</sup> See *Report of the Committee to Study the Importance of Student Body Diversity* (2016), p. 1 and *Report of the College Working Group on Diversity and Inclusion* (2015).

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/1988/3/10/getting-off-the-fence-pbibn-a/>. We include statements and citations in this report from public sources because we found them pertinent. We explicitly note that we are not intending to suggest that the individuals we quote have in any way reviewed this report or endorse any of its contents.

<sup>5</sup> *Report of the Committee to Study the Importance of Student Body Diversity*, p. 2. It is noteworthy that, due to their reputation for discrimination and exclusion, an affiliation with the final clubs can sometimes be perceived as incompatible with public office. Observe that, in 2006, gubernatorial hopeful Deval Patrick felt it necessary to confirm to the *Boston Globe* that he had resigned his membership of an all-male final club in 1983, perceiving it to be incompatible with his "campaign of inclusion." Senator Edward M. Kennedy similarly resigned his membership after public pressure. See *Boston Globe*, August 3, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> These are the same survey responses that were provided to the Implementation Committee and that were circulated to all FAS voting faculty in an email from Dean Michael D. Smith sent by the Office of the Secretary on November 21, 2016. As explained in Dean Smith's email, these data were "responses from the freshman, senior, and House life surveys that include the words final club, fraternity, and/or sorority from academic year 2010 to the present."

discrimination. This leads the Committee to believe that, without strong decisive action, little positive change is likely to occur. This report, thus, articulates an aspiration to improve the educational experiences and social lives of all Harvard students while they are on campus.

To that end, this report offers a recommendation for a new policy, for which there was strong majority support in the Committee. As will be detailed below, this proposed new policy mirrors the practice of many of our peer institutions. While the circumstances of its implementation are necessarily different, it is hoped that Harvard University may follow suit and enjoy the same transformation in undergraduate life celebrated by these institutions.

It is important to note here that the Committee and College leaders understand the distinctions between the various types of USGSOs. While the issues that the College is endeavoring to solve are rooted in many ways in the property-owning, wealthy, and exclusive final clubs, the growth of other types of USGSOs in recent years—often as well-intentioned antidotes to the effects of the final clubs—are also of concern in their participation in and perpetuation of social structures that discriminate based on gender, race, class, and sexual orientation. In order to move beyond the gendered and exclusive club system that has persisted—and even expanded—over time, a new paradigm is needed, one that is rooted in an appreciation of diversity, commitment to inclusivity, and positive contributions to the social experience for all students.

## ***2. Comments on the existing policy***

As stated above, the policy on USGSOs, which was adopted in May 2016, has the “explicit goal of ending the gender segregation and discrimination of these organizations in a manner that is consistent with our educational mission, non-discrimination principles, and applicable law.” The Committee emphatically embraces and reaffirms Harvard’s non-discrimination principles and recognizes that the behaviors and attitudes of the USGSOs are wholly incompatible with those principles.

Since May 2016, the discourse around the policy in the media and elsewhere has centered almost exclusively on the issue of gender segregation. The Committee’s deliberations addressed the manifold forms of discrimination exhibited by the USGSOs. Our main reservation about the stated goal of the policy was whether the focus on ending gender segregation and discrimination is too narrow. While the current policy endeavors to address an important element of discrimination in social organizations, the Committee also has concerns about broader issues in these organizations related to exclusion and conduct, which are not addressed by the May 2016 policy.

Some USGSOs have already taken steps to admit members of both genders. However, even if all of these organizations adopted gender-neutral membership in a timely fashion, there would remain a myriad of practices of these organizations that go against the educational mission and principles espoused by Harvard University. The appeal to “non-discrimination” is likely to remain inadequate to address the complexities of the socially distorting and pernicious effects of the clubs that exclude while also dominating the social scene at Harvard. The principle of inclusion (or belonging) was therefore an additional motivating principle that framed the Committee’s work.

To be sure, many students who are members of the USGSOs report a profound sense of belonging. For them, their organization offers a place where they feel “at home”

at Harvard, sheltered from the typical stresses of academic life. They report making steadfast friends. Their sense of belonging, however, comes at the expense of the exclusion of the vast majority of Harvard undergraduates. Of course, that is the definition of selective-membership clubs: some belong, some don't. However, it is the invidious manner in which such clubs form their memberships and generate their guest lists (in the case of those that host parties) that makes them incompatible with the goals and standards of Harvard University. Observe that one student, who belonged to a male final club and who wrote to the Committee in May 2017 just as he was poised to graduate, has had second thoughts about the punch process, especially having just learned—three years after the fact—of the damaging effect it had on one of his blockmates.<sup>7</sup> His anonymous letter to the Committee articulates clearly why the exclusive practices and destructive conduct that characterize selective-membership organizations that are primarily social (final clubs, fraternities, sororities and like organizations) raise questions as to whether any such organization that creates social divisions on a campus should be part of Harvard's future. He urges the University to abolish the USGSOs. Indeed, a significant number of the observations in his letter point to the host of ways in which the current practices of the USGSOs run counter to all the efforts to celebrate diversity and inclusion in the Harvard student body and to “ensure that our students may fully benefit from our deliberate institutional choice to foster a diverse living and learning community.”<sup>8</sup>

Aside from issues of the discrimination and inclusion/exclusion practices of the USGSOs, students who belong to the USGSOs may be alienated from a sense of belonging to Harvard, drawn as they are into private enclaves and their regulatory bodies. Compare the recognized independent student organizations (ISO) at Harvard, which are protected from divided allegiances. One requirement for them to remain in good standing is that they maintain local autonomy. ISOs must:

maintain local autonomy in the governance of the organization. This means that the ISO must make all policy decisions without obligation to any parent organization, national chapter, or charter, and without direction, interference or pressure from any such entity. ISOs that have graduate trusteeships or other advising boards composed of responsible alumni ordinarily will be considered to be in compliance with this rule.<sup>9</sup>

This protects Harvard students and gives them independence of thought and activity from external forces. It might seem obvious, for example, that the Harvard Republican Club or the Harvard College Democrats could operate under the aegis of their national counterparts. However, Harvard does not permit this, so that students are not beholden to party mandates. The fraternities and sororities necessarily have national affiliations. Students belonging to both Harvard and these institutions are called upon to follow the regulations and policies of two separate entities. In the case of the final clubs, which have strong alumni governance, the fact that we are aware of current students wishing for their

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<sup>7</sup> The student's letter is provided in full in Appendix 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Report of the Committee to Study the Importance of Student Body Diversity*, p. 12.

<sup>9</sup> See *Harvard College Handbook for Students*, section on “Responsibilities of Recognized Independent Student Organizations,” <https://handbook.fas.harvard.edu/>.

club to take certain decisions, while the alumni wish for something entirely different, highlights the tensions that can arise from the lack of autonomy of student organizations. When loyalties are split, students become alienated from both environments.

With these factors in mind, the Committee turned for inspiration to the practices of peer institutions that have taken steps to diminish the role of fraternities and sororities and/or equivalent exclusive-membership private social clubs on their campuses.

### ***3. Recommendation for a New Approach***

Peer institutions that have restricted students from joining fraternities, sororities and similar organizations include Amherst, Bowdoin, Middlebury, and Williams. Many coupled these restrictions with their new development of residential housing. In hindsight, Harvard missed that opportunity when the residential housing system was established in 1930.

The motivation behind the recommendation of such a policy is to create a social and educational environment in which final clubs and equivalent organizations would cease to have a pernicious influence on undergraduate life.<sup>10</sup> Social life would return to the houses and other common spaces on campus. It must be recognized, however, that even the adoption of this policy is no panacea in and of itself. Indeed, its adoption would have to be met with increased efforts to foster other social opportunities for students—not to mention the urgent need to create additional spaces on campus for students to socialize. Naturally, students are invited to be agents in creating and co-creating social opportunities—opportunities that will be available to all students who would like to participate.

We therefore recommend modeling Harvard’s policy on the policies of our peer institutions. Members of the Committee favored the approach of Williams and Bowdoin. In particular, some favored the wording of Williams’s policy for its simplicity, while others preferred Bowdoin’s for its detail, as well as for its inclusion of a pledge.<sup>11</sup> The relevant extracts of their policies are as follows:

***Policy of Williams College:*** Williams students may neither join nor participate in fraternities during their time at the College. This policy was first adopted in 1962, and it is strongly supported by the College community. The College will take disciplinary action against students who are found to be participating in such organizations. Penalties may include suspension or expulsion from the College.<sup>12</sup>

It is important to note that the policy at Williams was first adopted 8 years before the College went co-ed. The policy has twice been reaffirmed: once in 1976, and again in 1989 when, in light of attempts to reintroduce fraternal organizations, the Board of Trustees issued the following statement to “insure that all students understand the history of and reasons for this policy”:

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<sup>10</sup> See also the *Report of the Committee to Study the Importance of Student Body Diversity*, p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> See also the section “Signing of an Affirmation” on pp. 7–8 of this report.

<sup>12</sup> See <https://dean.williams.edu/policies/fraternities/>.

It has now been twenty-seven years since the Board of Trustees of Williams College determined that the academic aspirations of the College, and the educational and social needs of our students, would best be served by abolishing fraternities and inaugurating the residential house system. The Trustees note with particular pleasure the role the residential house system has played in insuring that all Williams students would be fully integrated into the life of the College. In making all important decisions over nearly three decades, the College has had as its central goal the sustenance of a community characterized by openness, academic vitality, and equality of opportunity.<sup>13</sup>

***Policy of Bowdoin College:*** Since the fall semester 1997, all Bowdoin students are prohibited from joining fraternities. Students involved in rushing, pledging, perpetrating, and initiating activities by fraternities and similar selective-membership social organizations will be dismissed permanently from Bowdoin College.

In March 1997, the College's Board of Trustees voted to replace the fraternity system with the College House system and to phase out fraternities by May 2000. This policy covers all Bowdoin students and fraternities and their relationships with other similar private, selective-membership social organizations, whether they are residential or non-residential, or have any local or national affiliation. Violations of College regulations regarding membership in and other activities related to private, selective-membership social organizations will be considered violations of Bowdoin's Social Code and will be adjudicated according to the normal Judicial Board procedures.<sup>14</sup>

During matriculation, members of each incoming class of Bowdoin must sign a "pledge" that reads:

I have read, understand, and agree to abide by the Academic Honor Code and the Social Code.<sup>15</sup>

It is unlikely that Harvard can improve upon the policies of these peer institutions. Given the success of the policies of these institutions in achieving similar goals, the Committee recommends that Harvard University adopt an equivalent policy to those of Williams and Bowdoin, adapting the language as appropriate to Harvard's social climate. As stated at the outset of this document, this policy would apply to all organizations listed in Appendix 2. It is also anticipated that it would apply to any organizations that might in

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<sup>13</sup> For a book-length study of the reasons leading up to the introduction of the policy at Williams, the struggles surrounding its implementation, the benefits it brought to the undergraduate community, and the subsequent rise in stature of the College, see John W. Chandler, *The Rise and Fall of Fraternities at Williams College: Clashing Cultures and the Transformation of a Liberal Arts College* (Williams College Press, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.bowdoin.edu/studentaffairs/student-handbook/college-policies/fraternity-membership-policy.shtml>.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.bowdoin.edu/studentaffairs/student-handbook/college-policies/index.shtml>.

the future be newly formed or newly named or otherwise newly designed to be similar to the organizations listed in Appendix 2. “Neither join nor participate” includes but is not limited to: membership; “pledging,” “punching,” or “rushing” (i.e. participating in new member programming or recruitment); attending or participating in any activity sponsored by the organizations listed in Appendix 2. The wording of the following policy is proposed as a guide (the Committee recognizes that its wording may need fine-tuning):

Harvard students may neither join nor participate in final clubs, fraternities or sororities, or other similar private, exclusionary social organizations that are exclusively or predominantly made up of Harvard students, whether they have any local or national affiliation, during their time in the College. The College will take disciplinary action against students who are found to be participating in such organizations. Violations will be adjudicated by the Administrative Board.

#### ***4. Signing of an Affirmation***

The affirmation of awareness stipulated by the currently existing May 2016 policy is logical in that it clarifies eligibility for fellowships, leadership positions, and captaincies. This Committee’s proposed policy, however, would apply to all students and would be included in the *Harvard College Handbook for Students*. The Committee saw no reason to attach an affirmation of awareness specifically to this Committee’s proposed policy compared to others found in the *Handbook*.

The Committee considered whether to adopt Bowdoin’s model of pledging general compliance with an honor code and social code (Bowdoin’s “social code” is not limited to its policy on fraternities and similar private, selective-membership social organizations). Although some members of the Committee saw advantages in adopting such a social code (or equivalent), the Committee concluded there was no reason to recommend this move at present. It seems sufficient to continue the assumption—as we always have—that students are aware of the contents of the *Handbook* upon enrollment.

Some institutions make the link between enrollment in their college and compliance with college regulations explicit. Witness, for example, the following opening paragraph of the Yale College regulations:

Each student in Yale College is required as a condition of enrollment to comply with the *Undergraduate Regulations*. The University expects students to be familiar with the *Undergraduate Regulations* and to use this online version for reference during the course of the academic year. An assertion of ignorance of any of the rules published herein will not be accepted as an excuse for any violation of them. No student or group of students should expect to be individually warned to conform to any of the rules contained in the *Undergraduate Regulations*.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> <http://catalog.yale.edu/undergraduate-regulations/>. The same paragraph also heads the section on “academic regulations.” Yale’s equivalent to Harvard’s *Handbook for Students* is the *Bulletin*.

Harvard's parallel introduction in the section "Notice to Students" in the *Harvard College Handbook for Students* is lighter in tone:

This website [*Harvard College Handbook for Students*] contains a concise review of the rules and procedures of Harvard College with which students are expected to be familiar.<sup>17</sup>

The Committee is of the view that, at present, this statement is sufficient.

### **5. Implementation**

We recommend that the new policy apply to students entering in the fall of 2018 (Class of 2022). *All currently enrolled students including those who will matriculate this fall will be exempt from the new policy for the entirety of their time at Harvard.* This will lead to a transition period, whereby USGSOs would be phased out by May 2022.<sup>18</sup> When the Class of 2022 matriculates, those who are already members of USGSOs should avoid tempting students into violation of the policy by punching or engaging in any form of solicitation or inviting them to participate in USGSO activities. However, it will be incumbent upon the students under the new policy not to violate the policy.

The Committee considered the following logistical point, given that the May 2016 policy applies to the Class of 2021. If this Committee's recommendation is accepted, then there will come a time when the Classes of 2022, 2021, and 2019–2020 would co-exist under three different sets of regulations regarding the USGSOs (and this situation would continue until the end of AY 2020). It is likely to be unwieldy for the College and potentially confusing for students to have three active policies at the same time. Purely for these practical reasons, we therefore recommend that, if and only if this Committee's proposed policy is accepted, the May 2016 policy, which would uniquely apply to the Class of 2021, should be rescinded. Then, the Committee recommends—again for purely practical reasons—that the Class of 2021 should fall under all the same regulations as the Classes of 2019–2020.

When Princeton introduced its policy in 2012, it produced a document of FAQs to guide students.<sup>19</sup> A similar document for Harvard students should be prepared because it would ensure clarity, especially during the period when different students on campus would fall under different policies.

### **6. Other points of view**

There can be no question that any solution proposed to tackle the systemic problems surrounding the USGSOs will be contentious. The problem—and the attendant quagmire—is not unique to Harvard but is being faced by campuses across the country. **It is important to note that no one has suggested doing nothing.** The need for change is

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<sup>17</sup> <https://registrar.fas.harvard.edu/general-information/handbooks>.

<sup>18</sup> See Bowdoin, which phased out the fraternity system over a number of years: "In March 1997, the College's Board of Trustees voted to replace the fraternity system with the College House system and to phase out fraternities by May 2000."

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.princeton.edu/odus/docs/fraternity-sorority-rush-ban-faq.docx>. See also footnote 22 below.



urgent, and if the USGSOs are not motivated to change from within, it unfortunately falls to the College to take action. The following are other proposals that arose in the course of the Committee's deliberations.

There was significant support for keeping the current policy and the recommendations in the *Report of the Implementation Committee for the Policy on Membership in Single Gender Social Organizations* that were accepted by Dean Khurana.<sup>20</sup> Encouraged by the steps taken by some USGSOs (even while acknowledging the resistance to change of others), members of the Committee in support of this option argued that this policy may—given sufficient time—motivate the USGSOs to transform entirely, and not just with respect to gender discrimination. They understand this policy as serving as an incremental step towards a more symbiotic relationship between Harvard College and the USGSOs. It would allow the USGSOs to continue to exist, while expecting Harvard College to believe that, unlike the efforts of the last 30 years, this time will be different. Ideally, the USGSOs would reform and would evolve along with Harvard College into an ever-increasing place for diversity and inclusion—and the policy would become moot.

A small minority argued that there should be no formal policy on the USGSOs, championing instead freedom of association. That is to say, they proposed that neither the current policy nor the proposed policy should be entertained. In some cases, they also urged that the USGSOs be permitted to remain single-gender if they wish. The Committee considered the importance of allowing our students to select their own social spaces and friends, but we also recognize principles such as inclusiveness and equality, which many members of the Harvard community consider of paramount importance to our mission. Proponents of this proposal made clear that their proposal for no formal policy on the USGSOs should not be mistaken for an advocacy that no change is needed or that nothing need be done to change the behavior and mindset of the USGSOs. They highlighted, for example, the problems of underage drinking and sexual assault. In offering a different solution, this minority also favored taking a more targeted approach to addressing specific incidents by asking the Cambridge Police Department to be more heavily involved in investigating the activities of the USGSOs and insisting that it make a more concerted effort to clamp down on violations of the law, including complaints of noise disturbances (noise disturbance is a common complaint, which apparently the police do little to attend to<sup>21</sup>). Proponents of this proposal also encouraged the College to continue discussions of the kind that have been tried over the years, with the aim of maintaining the existence of the USGSOs but hoping that this time the organizations recognize the need for change. Those critical of this proposal to have no formal policy on the USGSOs wondered why the College should wait for more—or more egregious—violations of the law to take place before taking action. One member of the Committee, who was part of this “small minority,” has written a dissenting opinion to this report; see Appendix 4.

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<sup>20</sup> In addition to the objectives of the May 2016 policy detailed in the *Implementation Report*, some additional FAQs and perspectives are included here:

<http://www.harvard.edu/media-relations/media-resources/popular-topics/single-gender-social-organizations>.

<sup>21</sup> See the student surveys. See also <http://harvardpolitics.com/harvard/bad-neighbors/>.

In the interest of considering a comprehensive range of possible policies, the Committee additionally explored two other options, neither of which received any traction. One was to delay when students could join a USGSO, perhaps to their junior or senior year. Such a policy would resemble Princeton's, which specifically prohibits freshmen from affiliating with a fraternity or sorority. Students beyond the freshmen year may not solicit freshmen. The policy applies to fraternity and sorority activities on or off campus.<sup>22</sup> Princeton explains the reasons for its policy as follows: "The University does not recognize fraternities and sororities because, in general, they do not add in positive ways to the overall residential experience on the campus. These organizations can contribute to a sense of social exclusiveness and often place an excessive emphasis on alcohol. Students are discouraged from participating in these organizations." The Committee rejected this option because it was persuaded by the arguments in the *Implementation Report* that "[t]hose [peer institutions] that took half-measures or changed course did not realize the same level of positive change in the undergraduate experience."<sup>23</sup>

Finally, the Committee also considered whether Harvard College should embrace a fully developed Greek system, including the growth of final clubs, as a potential solution to the awkwardness of the current partial system. No one on the Committee supported this idea. In fact, consideration of this option clarified the preference of the Committee for diminishing the role of USGSOs in campus life.

### ***7. Recommendation regarding the recognized independent student organizations (ISOs)***

Although the Charge of the Committee was to consider the USGSOs, we found it impossible not to draw comparison between the practices of the USGSOs and ISOs. All of the recognized independent student organizations, as part of their responsibilities and practices, must meet a comprehensive set of requirements to remain in good standing with the College.<sup>24</sup> The leaders and members of these student-run organizations are required to support a positive, inclusive, and non-discriminatory environment in which to pursue their activities. It is necessary to point out the profound differences between these ISOs and the USGSOs: the latter are primarily social organizations; the former tend to be skill-based, although they invariably have a social aspect. In some instances, the ISOs are defined by race and gender, however they may not discriminate on the basis of either race or gender.

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<sup>22</sup> In 2012, the President of Princeton University accepted the Freshmen Rush Policy Implementation Committee's recommendation for this policy; see <http://campuslife.princeton.edu/freshmen-rush-policy>. The policy is articulated in Princeton's handbook, *Rights, Rules, Responsibilities*, which is online as follows: <http://www.princeton.edu/pub/rrr/part2/index.xml#comp228>.

<sup>23</sup> *Report of the Implementation Committee for the Policy on Membership in Single Gender Social Organizations*, p. 12; the Committee also had access to the detailed research behind this statement, which is presented in Appendix C of the *Implementation Report*. (Appendix C is marked "confidential: for internal Harvard use only.")

<sup>24</sup> *Harvard College Handbook for Students*, section on "Responsibilities of Recognized Independent Student Organizations."

Collectively, the ISOs are a tremendous resource for students to gain leadership skills, to follow the best practices in developing an organized body of people with a particular purpose, and to model how institutions thrive when they move with the times. The important role ISOs play is underlined in the *Handbook*: “through recognized undergraduate organizations, each new class leaves its special mark on the cultural, social and intellectual life of the College.”<sup>25</sup>

Recognizing that ISOs have an important impact on the undergraduate experience at College, it seems an opportune time to evaluate whether the training provided and the procedures that are already in place to ensure the ISOs are in good standing are optimal and effective. Making sure that all leaders of ISOs are well-trained and that all leaders and members follow the comprehensive set of guidelines will demonstrate the seriousness of Harvard College’s convictions in fostering a better undergraduate experience for our students. The Committee believes that all members of our campus community must abide by uncompromisingly high standards of inclusion and respect. Since the goal of the Committee’s recommendation regarding the USGSOs is to insist on our campus commitment to non-discrimination, inclusion and belonging, and to attend to the safety and well-being of our students, the Committee recommends that the Dean of FAS charge the College to look into the ISOs with the view to assessing the current training, resources, and procedures and to ensuring that the ISOs follow best practices and demonstrate their robust compliance with the College’s shared values as outlined in the *Handbook*.

### **8. Further outreach**

This Committee was formed and its work began in March 2017. Our final meeting took place after Commencement. Our report is necessarily ready for release during the summer months, when there are no FAS Faculty Meetings, and students are not on campus. For those faculty and students interested in responding to the report immediately, we have created a [website](#) to encourage feedback (a Harvard ID is necessary to access the site). Alternatively, faculty and students may send an email to the Committee’s email address (which is provided in the email toppers attached to the circulation of the report). As part of the Committee’s continued consultation, the plan is also to hold open faculty discussions during the early fall 2017. All feedback—whether through the website, email, or faculty consultation in the fall—will be taken into account in presenting the recommendation to the President in the fall. The President will make the final decision.

### **9. Conclusion**

The Committee’s deliberations were carried out under the shadow of tragic events relating to hazing and excessive drinking at other campuses across America. In the wake of such events, other Colleges and Universities have taken reactive steps such as closing down certain fraternities. The Committee’s recommendation is in part intended as a preventative step. The comments written by Harvard students in the anonymous surveys about events that take place behind the closed doors of the USGSOs are disturbing, and the comments about the negative effects that the USGSOs have on fellow students in the

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<sup>25</sup> *Harvard College Handbook for Students*, section on “Responsibilities of Recognized Independent Student Organizations.”

Harvard community are heartbreaking. These surveys cover academic years 2010–2011 through 2014–2015, from freshmen to seniors.<sup>26</sup> These data include instances of male and female students affirming their satisfaction with and vigorous support of the USGSOs. In response to the prompt to comment on their “most positive academic experience,” a considerable number point to their final club, fraternity or sorority. At the same time, there is a striking consistency in other students’ characterization of their negative experiences regarding the USGSOs. The Committee is aware of complaints about the incompleteness of this and other data samples. However, the voices of the students deserve to be heard; we cannot turn a blind eye to the message they are sending us: the kinds of problems they describe are unacceptable in the modern age and they profoundly violate the values of Harvard University.

There is a long history of various faculty, administrators, and students expressing repeated concern for the well-being of Harvard students who are both members and guests of these organizations. For example, in 1997, a former Dean of Students issued a letter to students pointing to a series of events that were reported to have occurred during 1996.<sup>27</sup> As stated in the letter, the purpose of making the events public was to “spur the clubs in question to act more responsibly.” The Dean of Students also wrote in the same letter: “[W]e wish to remind the community that through their policies and actions the clubs have shown little respect for decency and for the principles of the College, including the equal rights of women.”<sup>28</sup> Even a year later, this open communication seems to have had little effect, for in 1998, then-Dean of Harvard College penned a column for the *Harvard Independent* in which he pointed out that “evidence abounds that alcohol laws are flouted at the Clubs. It is only the end of October, and already six underage students have come to our attention for misbehavior or injury and have told us that they had been drinking at a Final Club at the time of the incident or earlier in the evening. There have been instances of seriously abusive drinking at the Clubs that have threatened the life of undergraduates. Many believe that if a death like that of MIT’s Scott Krueger were to occur to a Harvard student, the most likely locus would be a Final Club.” This column concludes with a comment that is just as pertinent today as it was two decades ago:

One final observation. It is argued that for some students the Clubs offer a necessary refuge from the combined academic and social stresses of Harvard College; that students may feel uncomfortable in the cacophonous diversity of their residential Houses, and the Clubs provide a beneficial respite where students (male students, that is) can find comfort in the company of people like themselves. This line of reasoning cuts very deep, and deserves a direct response. Since the conception of the House system, Harvard has been dedicated to the principle that the residential environment is as much as part of the learning experience as is the

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<sup>26</sup> See footnote 6.

<sup>27</sup> To reiterate the point made in footnote 4, we include statements and citations in this report from public sources because we found them pertinent. We explicitly note that we are not intending to suggest that the individuals we quote have in any way reviewed this report or endorse any of its contents.

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/1997/2/20/deans-letter-on-final-clubs-pithis/>.

classroom, and that in striving to make each House a cross-section of the College populations, we are creating an environment in which students of drastically different backgrounds and interests will learn from each other. Harvard makes no secret of the value it places on its residential system, and year after year there is good evidence that this formula is an educationally successful one for the vast majority of students of every social background, ethnicity, and intellectual and extracurricular interest. In the same way, Harvard makes no secret of its insistence that women and men treat each other with respect and as equals in every circumstance. Students know what to expect when they come to Harvard, and the Clubs do not serve students well as places where they may seek to escape from the basic tenets of the College they have chosen to attend.<sup>29</sup>

Twenty years later, little seems to have changed. Since 1998 the number of single-gender social organizations has proliferated, for women as well as men. In fact, their proliferation has had a decidedly pernicious influence on campus culture. And since the late 1990s there have been numerous attempts—by fellow students (often through the *Crimson*) and administrators—to warn students of problems associated with various clubs. Examples of such attempts could be enumerated at length, but perhaps the most notable (subsequent to those already cited) date from 2002, 2004, and 2012.<sup>30</sup> Time after time, the social organizations have demonstrated behavior inconsistent with an inclusive campus culture, a disregard for the personhood and safety of fellow students, and an unwillingness to change—even as new students join them over generations.

Like many institutions across America that have sought to address the problematic aspects of Greek life and its equivalents, Harvard has repeatedly attempted to encourage the USGSOs to reform. In the years since 1984 when the formal relationship between Harvard and the final clubs was ended, the College has taken various approaches. For many years, the College responded only to student conduct that violated the *Handbook for Students*. Over the past 10 years, College leadership has also endeavored to engage constructively with final club students and alumni as well as the growing number of fraternity and sorority student leadership. While communications have improved on some levels, the issues and concerns about discrimination, exclusion, and conduct persist. How many more attempts to persuade them are needed for the USGSOs to see the wisdom of creating an inclusive, healthy, and safe environment for Harvard students? This Committee believes we owe it to our future students to take action.

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<sup>29</sup> *Harvard Independent*, October 29, 1998.

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2004/10/26/shut-down-final-clubs-harvards-final/> and <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2012/11/30/final-club-invitation-door/>.

### *Chairs and Members of the Committee*

Suzannah Clark, *Co-Chair, Professor of Music; Chair of the Department of Music*  
Rakesh Khurana, *Co-Chair, Danoff Dean of Harvard College*

Daniel Banks, *Harvard College 2017*

Paul Barreira, *Director of Harvard University Health Services*

Theodore Bestor, *Reischauer Institute Professor of Social Anthropology; Director, Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies*

Naisha Bradley, *Director, Harvard College Women's Center*

Shub Chhokra, *Harvard College 2018*

Nathan Fry, *Senior Associate Director of Athletics*

Kacey Gill, *Harvard College 2020*

David Haig, *George Putnam Professor of Organismic and Evolutionary Biology*

Alison Johnson, *Professor of History*

Moses Kim, *Harvard College 2018*

James Kloppenberg, *Charles Warren Professor of American History*

Luke Leafgren, *Allston Burr Assistant Dean of Harvard College for Mather House*

Brigitte Libby, *Allston Burr Assistant Dean of Harvard College for Pforzheimer House*

Daniel Lieberman, *Edwin M. Lerner II Professor of Biological Sciences*

Caroline Light, *Lecturer on Studies of Women, Gender, and Sexuality*

Yukio Lippit, *Professor of History of Art and Architecture*

Greg Llacer, *Director of the Office of Undergraduate Research and Fellowships*

Jason Mitchell, *Professor of Psychology*

Sandra Naddaff, *Senior Lecturer on Comparative Literature; Former Master of Mather House; Dean of Harvard Summer School*

Katherine O'Dair, *Dean of Students*

David Pilbeam, *Henry Ford II Professor of Human Evolution*

Yasmin Sachee, *Harvard College 2018*

Mariano Siskind, *Professor of Romance Languages and Literatures and of Comparative Literature; Chair of the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures*

Latanya Sweeney, *Professor of Government and Technology in Residence; Faculty Dean of Currier House*

Caroline Tervo, *Harvard College 2018*

David Friedrich, *Staff to the Committee, Associate Dean of Students*

Ara Gershengorn, *Staff to the Committee, Office of the General Counsel*

The Committee on Unrecognized Single-Gender Social Organizations was convened by Dean Michael D. Smith. Members were selected to represent students who were both members and non-members of USGSOs and faculty and administrators from across the FAS and College community.

## Appendix 1

### *Committee Charge*

In February 2016, the Faculty of Arts and Sciences reaffirmed the University's "long-held and oft expressed view" that student body diversity is essential to Harvard College's pedagogical objectives and institutional mission. That report recognized that we take intentional steps not only in the classroom but also through attention to the structures and institutions in which our students spend their time at Harvard. "We want our students to engage with each other not only in their classes but where they eat, play, dance, sing, act, debate, write, throw, catch, relax, and, of course, study. We seek to achieve this goal through very deliberate choices in the way in the College is structured."

The College adopted, in May 2016, a new policy regarding unrecognized single-gender social organizations (USGSO) with the explicit goal of ending the gender segregation and discrimination of these organizations in a manner that is consistent with our educational mission, non-discrimination principles, and applicable law. For more than 30 years – since Harvard withdrew recognition from the male Final Clubs out of a belief that students should not be excluded from structured campus activities and organizations solely on the basis of their gender – the USGSOs have grown to be an outsized part of student social life. As reflected in survey comments, these organizations directly and negatively influence the undergraduate experience for many students who are not themselves members of these organizations. The discriminatory practices of these organizations undermine our educational mission and the principles espoused by this Faculty and distance their members from their College experience.

Today, the importance of inclusion and belonging, of nondiscrimination and acceptance, and of respect and tolerance for others cannot be gainsaid. The work of this committee – and ensuring that our students have non-discriminatory access to social opportunities that help define a Harvard College experience – is an integral part of our ongoing efforts to prepare our students to join in the fellowship of educated people and be leaders and examples for this world. The current USGSO policy addresses the complex issues that surround these organizations and the challenges they have posed for decades to our efforts to provide an inclusive and safe intellectual and social environment for our students. Further input from the faculty may strengthen our commitment to this approach or may yet uncover other approaches that are equally or even more effective at achieving our stated objectives.

With these considerations in mind, I charge the USGSO committee as follows:

- To familiarize itself with the current USGSO policy, its accepted implementation, and all available data relating to unrecognized single-gender social organizations. This will include but is not limited to the report of the Implementation Committee, the Task Force on Sexual Assault, Visiting Committee and Overseers reports, student survey responses, and information from other colleges and universities about their experiences with similar types of organizations;

- To consider whether there are other means of achieving our stated goals, including and especially that of fully advancing the non-discrimination objectives reflected in the current policy, and to evaluate whether any would be more effective than our current policy.
- To propose, should more effective means be identified, changes or expansions to the current policy or a new approach.

In developing its recommendations, the committee will consult as appropriate with the broader Harvard community, including members of the FAS faculty and students, on issues relating to student social life, inclusion, and belonging. The committee is asked to complete its work by the end of this semester and to present its public report and recommendations to me in the early fall of 2017. Any recommended change to our current policy must be approved by the President of the University.



## Appendix 2<sup>31</sup>

### **Unrecognized Social Clubs with Gender-Neutral Policies (as of the publication of the *Report of the Implementation Committee for the Policy on Membership in Single Gender Social Organizations*)**

Hasty Pudding Club

The Spee Club\*

The Oak Club\*

The Sab Club (formerly known as The Sabliere Society)\*\*

The Seneca\*\*

*\*Traditionally all male final/social clubs whose policies are now gender inclusive*

*\*\*Traditionally all female final/social clubs whose policies are now gender inclusive*

### **Unrecognized Single Gender Social Organizations**

#### **Unrecognized Female Final Clubs**

La Vie Club Inc.

The Bee Club

The IC Club

The Pleiades Society

#### **Unrecognized Male Final Clubs**

A.D. Club

Delphic Club

The Fox Club

Phoenix S.K. Club

The Fly Club

The Owl Club

The Porcellian Club

#### **Unrecognized Fraternities**

Alpha Epsilon Pi Fraternity

Delta Kappa Epsilon

Kappa Sigma

Sigma Alpha Epsilon

Sigma Chi Fraternity

#### **Unrecognized Sororities**

Alpha Phi

Delta Gamma

Kappa Alpha Theta- Zeta Xi Chapter

Kappa Kappa Gamma

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<sup>31</sup> This list of USGSOs is based on Appendix E of the *Report of the Implementation Committee for the Policy on Membership in Single Gender Social Organizations*.

### Appendix 3

**To: The Harvard College Administration and Faculty**

**From: Member of the Class of 2017**

**Date: May 22, 2017**

**Re: College Policy on Unrecognized Single-Gender Social Organizations (USGSOs)**

As a sophomore who wanted nothing more than to lose my social anxiety, to feel validated by having friends and access to parties, I eagerly went through the punch process and joined a final club when I was offered membership. And then I sat through punch the next two years and found minutes before voting on their fate. He's a total weirdo. What a brutal kid. He's so fake. He's too quiet. He's too loud. I would never be friends with him. He's through to the next round. Sorry, he's cut.

I enjoyed it, too—sitting on a leather sofa in a mahogany wood-paneled room surrounded by taxidermy and deciding whom to allow into the space. Alumni stared down from photos on the walls as though to tell me what I was doing was important. It was history in the making. I was ensuring the club would continue to thrive. And I was making new friends.

Yes, I thought it rather odd that all the candidates were men. At the time, I tried to push for us to accept women. Maybe, then, if women were present, some members would refrain from making sexist jokes. Maybe the culture would improve. In retrospect, I think my efforts were misplaced. The notion that whether final clubs go co-ed is the key question now strikes me as absurd. For I don't pity those never subjected to this process; I pity those who go through punch and those who then learn to find friends like on-campus recruiters find interns.

The College's current policy on Unrecognized Single Gender Social Organizations (USGSOs) seeks to entice clubs to accept women as members. The arguments in favor of such a change are not unreasonable. Yes, going co-ed might improve club culture by causing men to think twice before making sexist jokes or treating women—now members rather than just guests—simply as objects of sexual desire. Yes, going co-ed might mitigate unhealthy power dynamics at final club parties. But co-ed will never solve—and, in fact, might reinforce—the exclusionary nature of social life at Harvard.

My roommate recently told me that one of his worst experiences at Harvard was not being punched by a final club when all of his blockmates, including me, had received letters under our doors inviting us to punch. Forcing clubs to go co-ed will not reduce these instances of exclusion. In fact, it will allow hundreds more women to know what it feels like not to get a letter. In the status quo, a woman not invited to a male club's punch does not think this means she isn't "cool" enough. That male clubs exclude women from punch might seem unfair to her, but the snub should not feel personal. No women were invited, so it can't just be about her. To a man who isn't invited, however, it will inevitably feel personal. He was eligible but not chosen. He knows someone believes he is less worth befriending than his roommates who got letters.

A system of co-ed final clubs would simply expand the number of people whose self-confidence and sense of self-worth suffer as a result of social exclusion. Is such an

outcome really more consistent with Harvard's values than the status quo?

As many have noted, final clubs reinforce existing campus inequities. Low-income students, who might not own a tuxedo or be comfortable with small-talk at cocktail parties, are disadvantaged from the outset. Gay men will likely feel unwelcome at male clubs that reinforce heteronormative social life by, among other practices, hosting events only with female clubs.

But final clubs will not suddenly conform to Harvard's values if they diversify across identity categories. Final clubs impact students differently, but they must all deny membership or participation to the vast majority of interested students to retain their cachet. More pragmatically, clubs need a membership small enough for participants to form meaningful friendships. Being disadvantaged because of one's socioeconomic status is particularly unfair, but exclusion inheres in the club system for students of all backgrounds.

Harvard College's current policy on social organizations set to take effect this fall thus leaves the problem of social exclusion essentially unaddressed. This might help explain why final clubs and the proposed sanctions are both opposed by about 60% of students. A small minority believes Harvard should stay out of students' social lives. But many more likely think the sanctions will harm female organizations, including sororities, while failing to reduce the influence of male final clubs.

To address these concerns, Harvard should look to Williams College for inspiration. The Williams policy on fraternities is as follows: "Williams students may neither join nor participate in fraternities during their time at the College. This policy was first adopted in 1962, and it is strongly supported by the College community. The College will take disciplinary action against students who are found to be participating in such organizations. Penalties may include suspension or expulsion from the College."<sup>1</sup> Harvard College should craft an equivalent policy that would restrict students from joining final clubs and similar organizations, co-ed or otherwise.

The basic idea behind such a policy is that it would dissuade enough students from joining final clubs such that these clubs would cease to affect undergraduate life. Instead, social life would return to the houses. The College has already begun to increase social opportunities for students with OSL grants, new common spaces in renovated houses, and faster party registration. More than 60% of 2017 graduates surveyed by The Crimson report that final clubs did not play an important role in their social lives. Of course, Harvard could do more. A good start would be to move the Office of Undergraduate Research and Fellowships (URAF) and similar offices away from Dunster Street houses, converting them into flexible social spaces for students. One could also imagine an 18+ club (like Toads at Yale) replacing the unoccupied Brattle Street movie theater.

Some are concerned that getting rid of final clubs will overly limit social opportunities for students, including those who are not club members. Admittedly, clubs play a larger role in social life than they did before the drinking age was raised to twenty-one. It is important to recognize, however, that the final clubs are not worth preserving for their contribution to social life. Their events benefit a small minority of students while

<sup>1</sup> <https://dean.williams.edu/policies/fraternities>

harming many more. Banning final clubs is thus justified regardless of whether the College concurrently expands other inclusive social opportunities. Importantly, if students were less able to rely on off-campus mansions for social fulfillment, they might become more involved in the houses and think creatively about how to improve Harvard's social scene. A more stringent set of sanctions on final clubs would therefore strengthen other parts of undergraduate social life.

In response to such a policy, defenders of the current social structure will point to alleged hypocrisy on Harvard's part. After all, they argue, Harvard denies admission to 95% of applicants. What right does Harvard have to tell organizations not to be "exclusive"?

Admittedly, many organizations are exclusive. But not all forms of exclusion are equivalent. The benefits of selective admissions arguably outweigh the costs of exclusion. Being surrounded by a limited number of diverse and talented peers allows students to learn from each other and form close friendships. If Harvard succeeds in its mission to educate "citizens and citizenleaders" to build companies, lead governments, treat patients, and teach students, society benefits. In addition, Harvard tries to account for many forms of disadvantage by using a holistic process; and, rejected applicants attend an array of other excellent institutions.

Unlike in college admissions, where a one-off Harvard rejection letter is often followed by four happy years at Princeton or Yale, rejection from final clubs is constant. It occurs each time someone walks down Mt. Auburn Street on a Friday night or overhears dining hall gossip about black tie dinners in secret spaces. What corresponding benefit justifies such constant exclusion?

Undoubtedly, students who join final clubs also learn from one another and form close friendships. But do students at Williams College really form less meaningful friendships? Before coming to Harvard, I never thought mansions made friends.

The fact that the place hundreds of seniors wanted to go after Senior Soirée a few days ago was the Spee – to line up outside, ditch friends who wouldn't be let in, find more girls to improve the female-to-male ratio – reminded me that that the structure of Harvard's social life is the college's greatest weakness.

The current middle-of-the-road approach will leave Harvard facing continued criticism without having meaningfully fixed what troubles most students. As Williams did more than fifty years ago, the Administration and the Faculty should stand up to the clubs to stand up for Harvard's values.

## Appendix 4

### *Dissenting opinion by Professor David Haig, member of the Committee*

*[NB: This dissenting opinion was written after the completion of the working draft of the report, to which members of the Committee were invited to contribute and which included the paragraph on the “minority view” on pp. 9–10.]*

The report proposes an escalation of the conflict between unrecognized social organizations and Harvard College. Rather than certain benefits being withheld, the recommendation is that membership in these organizations be considered incompatible with being a Harvard undergraduate. Moreover, the scope of the policy has been expanded to include groups that admit both men and women but are considered socially exclusionary.

The sanctions policies have involved a conflict between competing goods: on the one hand, respect for student autonomy and freedom of association; on the other hand, non-discrimination and inclusivity. The report strongly favors the latter over the former goods. I continue to favor a balance more on the side of student autonomy because I am unconvinced that the policy, when implemented, will solve the latter problems.

I was part of the “small minority” mentioned in the report that favored targeting actions rather than groups. “Small minority” here refers to the committee’s membership. One of the problems with the reports of the various committees on USGSO policy is that there is still no way of knowing whether I represent an under-represented minority, an over-represented minority, or an under-represented majority of FAS faculty because the sanctions policy has never come to the faculty for a vote.

We have somewhat better information on student opinions from the 2016 referendum on the sanctions policy. Of the 3,042 students who voted, 1,820 voted in favor of repeal of the sanctions, 923 voted against repeal, and 299 abstained (my data come from the report in the Harvard Crimson). The majority of undergraduates did not vote in the referendum but of those who voted 60% were in favor of repeal and 30% voted against repeal. There is a disconnect between these numbers on student opinion and the general tone of this committee’s report which emphasizes deep unhappiness among students with the social environment created by the clubs (I will use club generically for final clubs, fraternities, sororities, and like organizations).

The various committees on USGSO policy, including this one, have never sought quantitative unbiased data on student opinions but have relied on selected comments of students opposed to the clubs. I have received numerous comments from present and former, male and female, students describing the positive contribution of the clubs to a sense of belonging at Harvard and relatively few comments supporting the sanctions. It would be wrong for me to conclude from my data that most students support the USGSOs because my data are a highly biased sample of opinions (unsolicited comments

are probably preferentially sent to those predisposed to be supportive). But the same goes for the selective use of data in support of sanctions. There is no doubt that some students, faculty, and deans find the clubs deeply offensive but well-informed social policy requires knowledge of the full-range of student opinions. Harvard College can do better in reasoning with data.