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Over the past two academic years, this body has had a robust discussion about how the University should respond to the many issues presented by unrecognized single-gender social organizations (USGSOs), including the final clubs, sororities, and fraternities. We appreciate the intense engagement of the Faculty on an issue that will shape the non-academic educational experience of current and future students. These discussions have helped both to generate deeper understanding and to define the range of plausible options. It is now time to decide the path forward—a way that builds on what we have learned, that establishes ongoing opportunities for Faculty engagement, and that permits students in the Class of 2021 to make fully informed decisions about whether to participate in a USGSO.

At its meeting yesterday, the Corporation, of which the President is a member, identified the following framework for a decision:

First, the University must act. The final clubs in particular are a product of another era, a time when Harvard's student body was all male, culturally homogenous, and overwhelmingly white and affluent. Our student body today is significantly different. We self-consciously seek to admit a class that is diverse on many dimensions, including on gender, race, and socioeconomic status. As this Faculty recognized when it unanimously endorsed the statement on the benefits of diversity, that diversity is central to our mission, as well as to our understanding of an effective educational environment in which students learn from exploring their differences. It is central to our obligations to society and to our students. It is central to the very organization of the College, which emphasizes a residential undergraduate experience where students are randomly assigned to Houses as a means of maximizing each student's exposure to people unlike themselves. Indeed, we are in the midst of a lawsuit, as well as an investigation by the United States government, in which we are vigorously defending these bedrock commitments.

While we should respect tradition, it is incumbent on us to organize the institution for the benefit of our current students and those who will follow. This requires us to create a community where students have the fair opportunity to engage in curricular and extracurricular activities regardless of their gender, socioeconomic status, or other attributes unrelated to merit. There are those who agree with this principle but argue that the impact of USGSOs should not be a matter of University concern given the organizations' independent legal status. We disagree. We cannot ignore the responsibility we bear in relationship to our students' experience in these settings and their effect on the broader community. These organizations are very much of Harvard: They are effectively on our campus, consist exclusively of Harvard students and graduates, and directly influence the character of undergraduate life. More importantly, in their current incarnation, they stand in the way of our ability to provide a fully challenging and inclusive educational experience to the diverse students currently on our campus.

The USGSOs have a very different relationship to the campus than was the case a generation ago, and it cannot be seriously disputed that the overall impact is negative. There has been wide agreement on this point during the discussions of this Faculty. It has been noted by College visiting

committees, as well as by College and University committees, including the Task Force on the Prevention of Sexual Assault and the USGSO Faculty Committee. Most recently, the president and vice president of the Undergraduate Council, reporting on the results of a survey of the undergraduates, concluded that “[t]he status quo is untenable. Final clubs are omnipresent and omnipotent. The negative externalities of Harvard’s divisive social life cannot be ignored. The stratification that many of these groups insert into our community is striking and their impact is widely felt.”

The Corporation’s first principle is the need to act; its second is this: at least as an initial step, we should proceed in such a way as to give students both choice and agency in bringing about changes to the campus culture. This serves several goals. It advances our educational mission by asking students to take account of their own values as well as their responsibilities as members of an academic community. And it starts from a premise of trust in our students to be active participants in bringing about the change of culture that most directly affects them.

Preserving choice and agency also honors the thoughtful concerns we have heard expressed about the need to balance competing interests wherever possible. The tensions between freedom and equality, between the rights of the individual and the welfare of the community have long challenged American society and have been the focus of much of the USGSO debate. As a professor of history noted in last October’s Faculty meeting, “the freedom of association enjoyed by some of our students comes at the cost of excluding the majority of our students from those associations.”

Finally, the Corporation emphasized a third framing principle, one that resonates with the long-standing expectations of this Faculty: we should not become a Greek school, much less one where these organizations exist outside the College’s supervision.

Given these principles, the Corporation at its meeting yesterday voted to adopt one of the options recommended by the USGSO Faculty Committee: namely that the existing policy, adopted in May 2016, should remain in place. Under the policy, students may decide to join a USGSO and remain in good standing. Decisions often have consequences, as they do here in terms of the students’ eligibility for decanal endorsements and leadership positions supported by institutional resources. The policy does not discipline or punish the students; it instead recognizes that students who serve as leaders of our community should exemplify the characteristics of non-discrimination and inclusivity that are so important to our campus. Ultimately, students have the freedom to decide which is more important to them: membership in a gender-discriminatory organization or access to those privileges and resources. The process of making those types of judgments, the struggle of defining oneself, one’s identity, and one’s responsibilities to a broader community, is a valuable part of the personal growth and self-exploration we seek for our undergraduates. The USGSOs, in turn, have the choice to become gender-neutral and thus permit their members full access to all institutional privileges.

In continuing the existing policy, the Corporation recognizes that its most direct focus is on eliminating the allocation of social opportunities on the basis of gender—and that other concerns identified by the USGSO Faculty Committee, including other forms of exclusionary practices, may not be fully addressed. We take these concerns seriously. We proceed on the hope that the existing policy will be a powerful inducement to change. For those USGSOs that end their gender-exclusionary practices, a more inclusive membership may diminish their negative impact on campus. Even for those USGSOs that resist our call to broaden opportunities to our entire student body, the conversations over the past two years may encourage them to adopt practices to limit their impact. Open selection processes and no public parties would be positive steps in that

direction, and we urge the organizations to adopt these practices. Change may also come from the student body, as the ongoing attention paid to the USGSOs, and the policy itself, force students to think seriously about their relationship to these organizations. If enough students make different choices, cultural changes will follow.

Still, we recognize that the existing policy may not be effective in addressing all aspects of the problems identified through the careful work of the committees convened in recent years. The Corporation has explicitly voted that the policy be reviewed after five years and the resulting report presented to and discussed by the Faculty. The President has conferred with the Deans of the Faculty and the College, who will ask the standing Committee on Student Life to ensure that the College has an ongoing understanding about how the undergraduate experience is evolving in light of the policy. The College expects to ask the Committee, as part of its charge, to make periodic, interim reports to the Faculty and the Deans. We also encourage members of the Faculty to remain engaged on issues affecting the quality of undergraduate life and to share thoughts and observations with the Committee and the Deans.

It is equally important for the University to continue its investments to encourage the return of student social life to Harvard-owned locations. Much of this work is under way through House renewal and the creation of new student space in the renovated Smith Campus Center, scheduled to open in the fall. In part supported by presidential resources, the College has also dramatically expanded its social programming—including by increasing the funds available to students, through their House Committees, the Undergraduate Council, and the Intramural Council, to host student-run events. The President has committed additional resources to help support the College's ongoing efforts in this area for the current academic year. We also recognize the concerns expressed by women students about the deficiencies in the campus social environment that have led many to seek membership in sororities. The College is committed to continuing the necessary work of addressing these issues in ways consistent with our broader educational mission.

We want to say a word about the role played by the Corporation in this decision. The questions raised by the USGSOs implicate a range of fundamental institutional interests. Every option under consideration, including maintaining the status quo, presented a set of legal considerations requiring advice from counsel. Different options had different resource implications. How we proceed has been a topic of interest among College alumni, with whom the members of the Corporation regularly engage in their institutional roles. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the decision speaks to the responsibility of the University to meet the non-academic needs of its student body and to define the fundamental character of the College itself. Each of these considerations implicates the fiduciary responsibilities of the board—all the more so, at this moment of presidential transition, when the community has an interest in being assured that the decision announced today is not contingent on the occupant of Massachusetts Hall.

We wish to close by expressing our deep appreciation for the work of the USGSO Faculty Committee, the Implementation Committee, the Faculty as a whole, and our students for their careful attention to this matter. Through their collective effort, we have developed a deeper understanding of the complexity of the issues presented by the USGSOs. The Corporation has been informed by this work, as is reflected by its decision to adopt one of the recommendations advanced by the USGSO Faculty Committee. We want separately to thank those students who through their leadership have already brought about changes that have advanced a more inclusive social experience at Harvard.

The USGSO Faculty Committee noted that “[f]or Harvard fully to reap the rewards of [student body] diversity, attention to inclusion is critical. We must take steps to ensure that all undergraduates can thrive in a healthy environment.” It is in that spirit that the Corporation has made the decision announced today and that we ask the College to assess the undergraduate experience in the years to come.