

Remarks by William C. Kirby, T. M. Chang Professor of China Studies, Spangler Family Professor of Business Administration

For FAS Faculty Meeting, 2 Oct. 17

I stand to oppose Harry's motion, not because it is too broad in its reach—for example, whether or not students can join political parties (of course they can)—but because its aim is a very narrow one: to constrain the College in its (in my view, proper) oversight of undergraduate social life and social organization.

The larger question before us, or behind this debate is: how should social life in Harvard College best be organized? Since its inception, Harvard College has had both the right and responsibility to oversee student life. So a central question here is one that many other colleges have faced in recent decades: do fraternities (and our final clubs *are* fraternities) help or hurt our central mission of graduating educated women and men?

I remember when Harry was Dean, he would rail about the excesses of the final clubs, and he educated me on the high percentage of sexual assault at Harvard that took place in them. I recall, Harry, that you would have closed them if you thought you could have, but our non-recognition doctrine toward them made that problematic at that time. But you were no fan of theirs, because you saw, in Ad Board case after Ad Board case, what could happen in them.

Well, we now have a welcome opportunity to revisit all this, and I would not want to put any option off the table for the College. I personally am not a fan of penalizing people (e.g. by not giving them fellowship endorsements) who are members of otherwise unregulated organizations. But the possibility of a bolder step—as Williams and Bowdoin have done to their great credit before us—of being fraternity-free, that is something we should have the freedom to study carefully.

And as we do so, we should study how to invigorate undergraduate life in and beyond our Houses. We are going a good job of renovating the buildings; perhaps it is time to renovate and revive their place in the social lives of undergraduates—something that I know our House Masters (a.k.a. Faculty Deans) care deeply about.

One last point: I'm a graduate of Dartmouth, which was and is a wonderful College. But my alma mater has never missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity to address the unhappy role fraternities play in student life. The current president, Phil Hanlon, is trying hard. But opportunities for change don't come often to an institution, and we should not miss ours.