



HARVARD

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Dean Rakesh Khurana
University Hall

Dear Dean Khurana,

I am delighted that you, Dean Smith, and President Faust are taking a step back to engage the community in search of modifications or alternatives to the USGSO policy announced last spring. In the hope and expectation that the concerns we all share about student life can be addressed without a patronizing intervention into both students' private lives and faculty prerogatives, I am, after consulting with my colleagues, withdrawing my motion. Of course, the principle articulated in the motion is no less important today than it was a few days ago. But with the immediate threat of injury and trespass on faculty rights somewhat tempered, it would not be a good use of Faculty time to debate a matter which may become operationally moot. If the policy is reaffirmed without adequate revision, however, I expect that the motion, or one similar to it, will be reintroduced.

The work of the new committee—and the likelihood of a consensus outcome—will be improved if open discussion is encouraged about exactly what “problems” need to be solved. The problem of noisy, out-of-control, dangerous alcoholic parties in buildings Harvard doesn't own is very different from the problem of women's unequal access to the financial and social power structure of the nation. The problem of sexual assault is very different from the problem of unsatisfactory House social life. The new committee has the opportunity to define what problems it wishes to solve, to base its recommended remedies in facts and reason, and to exercise a degree of humility about Harvard's ability to solve those problems without creating or exacerbating other problems.

None of these problems is uniquely associated with USGSOs, nor are most of the USGSOs strongly associated with any one of these problems. As always, a standard for any policy in this area will be its success in targeting the problems where they actually exist while leaving individuals free to make private choices where those choices are not demonstrably problematic. At a time when Harvard is admirably standing against overbroad, protectionist national policies that injure members of our community, it would be sadly ironic if the university were to implement for that community overbroad policies of its own, policies that needlessly harm some of its members while attempting to control its most noxious elements. To date, the present policy has divided students, faculty, and alumni. While certainly not its intention, it has been clearly divisive.

In her recent comments to the *Crimson*, President Faust helpfully noted that we should try not to invite lawsuits. Of course, that is quite right, but it is worth remembering that lawsuits are typically successful because one party has unreasonably harmed another. Perhaps we could aim for that higher standard—not merely to avoid litigation, but to avoid unnecessary harm even if no lawsuit is forthcoming. Doing so would require open ears and introspection on why USGSOs are so popular—and especially why the off-campus women's organizations are popular. President Faust herself, in her September 15 *Gazette* interview, suggested that she understood that women who join USGSOs are doing so for positive reasons. The committee—and ultimately you and the President—will need to balance the potential for



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good, and the potential for effectiveness, of any new policy against the harm it may unnecessarily cause. Not that students joining a private club should need to justify that decision to Harvard!

The committee has serious work ahead, but I am sure that if it sets reasonable objectives it can come up with good ideas. Almost any idea, however, can be shot down on the grounds that it fails to meet some unattainable or utopian goal. It would be particularly unfortunate if the “non-discrimination” standard cited by President Faust in a January 26 *Crimson* story turned otherwise good ideas into non-starters. It would be cynical, in particular, for Harvard to seek to crush the private, off-campus women’s organizations as “discriminatory” while congratulating itself that (in theory) its own organizations are all nondiscriminatory: that the Kroks are not really a men’s group, the Pitches are not really a women’s group, the Black Men’s Forum isn’t really a forum for black men, and the Women’s Center isn’t really a center for women. Belonging to a *de jure* single-gender organization off-campus is not inherently any more offensive than belonging to a *de facto* single-gender organization on-campus.

I look forward to the Committee’s recommendations, to what students have to say on the matter, and to a discussion of the recommendations in a meeting of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences in the fall.

Sincerely,

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Cc: Susan Lively, Secretary of the Faculty
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