

Why I Won't Give \$10 to Harvard

By G. David Bednar
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My 30th Harvard College reunion is in October. I plan to attend to see good friends and share great memories. Harvard asked for a donation. When I did not respond, they asked for a smaller one. Finally, the alumni office asked for just \$10 as a sign of support.

But I will not give \$10 to Harvard and want to explain why.

Re-Inventing the Past

The headlines from American campuses raise concern and often strain credulity. My hope on reading these stories is always that my school will set a standard to which others might repair. Recent examples prove Harvard has not.

The Harvard Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion recently distributed a “placemat guide for holiday discussions on race and justice with loved ones” to help students reform their parents’ bigoted views. Last week, the university extended a fellowship to a dishonorably discharged, 17-count felon and traitor to the nation. Disbelief followed by widespread indignation ensured the rescinding of the placemats and the invitation to Chelsea Manning. But astonishment lingers at the void of common sense, or mutated presumptions, necessary for them to have occurred in the first place.

The equally Orwellian Presidential Task Force on Inclusion and Belonging decided that the word “Puritans” (Harvard’s founders belonged to that sect) must be excised from the lyrics of the school’s 181-year-old anthem. The Task Force made the *1984* analogy unmistakable by adding, “an endorsed alternative” would be created, “the goal is to affirm what is valuable from

the past while also re-inventing that past to meet and speak to the present moment.”

In late 2015 Harvard removed the title “house master” from what are essentially residential advisers, a title that reflected Harvard’s Oxford and Cambridge roots. The administration announced that although “what came before was not wrong” as the “academic context of the term has always been clear,” and even though the tradition was “beloved” by many alumni, the university would nevertheless abolish the title because “the general feeling” is that it “causes discomfort.”

Harvard joined the mania for erasing disfavored historical references, removing the Royall Crest at the Law School. Harvard also authorized its first “Black Commencement” in 2017. Organizers explained the event was “not about segregation” but “building a community.” Wouldn’t a single, unified graduation do that? How can anyone who abhors racial division in America see separate graduations as a step forward?

To wide alarm, the administration announced it would withhold scholarship support and prohibit students from becoming team captains or leaders of student organizations if they joined finals clubs (private organizations similar to fraternities and sororities). Harry Lewis, former dean of the college and a computer science professor, called the plans “dangerous new ground” and “a frightening prospect.”

“Using ‘nondiscrimination’ as a cudgel against students’ private associations is odiously patronizing,” Lewis wrote in the *Washington Post*. By reaching into the private associations of Harvard students and declaring some of them to be, in essence, ‘suppressive persons’ because of their nonconformity, you are, I fear, passing from creating community to molding a monoculture . . . ”

The chairman of Harvard’s English Department announced earlier this year that all English majors will be required to take a course in authors “marginalized for historical reasons.” Literature that did not “benefit” from “racism, patriarchy, and heteronormativity” will be read. This is a version of what Yale’s Harold Bloom once called the School of Resentment. “To read

in the service of any ideology,” he wrote, “is not in my judgment to read at all..”

A university release in April claimed to have advanced diversity based on a 6 percent reduction in the proportion of white male faculty from 2008 to 2017. But the diversity that matters at a university is diversity of thought. According to a 2015 *Crimson* report, however, 96 percent of Harvard’s faculty recently supported Democrats. The dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences was “amazed at how high that number is.” Harvard government professor Harvey C. Mansfield observed, “The only debate we get here is between the far-left...and the liberals. It gives students a view that a very narrow spectrum of opinion is the only way to think.”

Harvard President Drew Gilpin Faust established a faculty committee on Harvard and slavery. She championed a conference this spring at which she remarked that even though the college never owned a slave it was “directly complicit” in slavery. Keynote speaker Ta-Nehisi Coates was blunter. “I think every single one of these universities needs to make reparations,” he said. “I don’t know how you get around that, I just don’t. I don’t know how you conduct research that shows that your very existence is rooted in a great crime...” Sitting next to Faust, he added: “Let me be very clear about something: I do think it involves a payment of money.” The intent of the conference being evident, two questions arise: First, if I give, how much will go to “reparations” and how will that improve education? Second, did Coates consider, in his calculation of Harvard’s unpaid debts for slavery, the hundreds of names of her Civil War dead on the tablets of Memorial Hall?

Heterodox Academy, a group that monitors free speech rights on campuses, ranks the University of Chicago No. 1 and Harvard No. 104. The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) gave Harvard its “red light” (worst) rating. The *Crimson* reports on a “political closet” at Harvard. One undergraduate related the need “to fall in line with what I think is the professor’s ideology.” Another who published a pro-life article “is nervous during our interview” and related social media efforts to isolate him. Yet another identifies the “notion that everyone should have free thought and be open to everyone’s ideas—except people who don’t agree with liberals.” The dean of freshmen recently acknowledged the

“dismaying” results of a survey revealing “political opinions and perspectives have not been given proper respect or appreciation on campus.” Is this the sole discrimination at Harvard that musters no outrage?

Today is Different

Some classmates console themselves that “colleges have always been liberal.” But in the early 1960s, Tom Hayden, co-founder of the left-wing Students for a Democratic Society, opposed the “endless repressions of free speech and thought, the stifling paternalism” and “parent-child relationship” at American universities. The aims of today’s student agitators have reversed. In the past, the academy was “left” because your professor wore a “Ban the Bomb” pin on his tweed sport coat but still taught you that Thomas Jefferson was a great man. Today’s pedagogy does not seek to restore American ideals but to refute them. The one-sided political domination, censorship of language, excising of anthems, purging of names, identity permeated curriculum, segregated commencements, and restrictions on free association make today very different.

How do Harvard’s historians, political scientists, and literature scholars fail to see the dystopian shadow; the authoritarian disregard of the law, destruction of tradition, and abolition of individual rights in service of an ideology?

Others do see it. “There is an idea floating around college campuses—including here at Harvard,—that scholars should be funded only if their work conforms to a particular view of justice,” former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg said at the 2016 Harvard commencement “There’s a word for that idea: censorship. And it is just a modern-day form of McCarthyism.” Former Harvard President Larry Summers has spoken of the “absurd political correctness” and “creeping totalitarianism” on campuses. He laments how “our leading academic institutions become places that prize comfort over truth” and obey a “dominant instinct to placate rather than to educate..” Harvard Law School’s Alan Dershowitz says a “fog of fascism is descending quickly over many American universities . . . it is the worst kind of hypocrisy.”

The Campus Matters

One observer of the modern academy noted, “What happens on the campus impacts the health of our nation.” Another wondered about the impact of the “infantilizing paternalism” that has defined education and parenting, where “fragility and vulnerability are the defining characteristics of personhood.”

For most of Harvard’s history, no college could claim greater honor in answering the nation’s call to arms. How deep are the ranks of these patriots at Harvard today, those ready to accept the sternest obligation of a free society? Harvard abides study based on skin color, gender, and sexual orientation. Identity politics has begotten identity education. This balkanization of learning is far from the tradition and even etymology of the university—a place to share a unifying human knowledge.

These are worthy concerns for any alumnus. But, immediately, this is not a debate about the “Great Books” or the higher purposes of the university. Lamentably, it is more fundamental. It is about restoring and protecting basic freedoms at Harvard.

The Harvard “Community”

Harvard speaks often of its “community.” Today, former presidents, faculty, students and alumni are asking “what is going on?”

The administration’s response to the criticism of its finals club policy confirms that Harvard is not listening. The dean behind the policy created a “student faculty committee” to review and present a revised policy. The committee ultimately revealed an even more controversial total ban on finals clubs and other “unsanctioned organizations.” However, it appears that the committee, led by the same dean, actually voted for two other options! How the “total ban” emerged remains obscure. What is clear is that this response reflects impudent disregard for the concerns of the community.

Harvard's fundraising events also dissemble. After "white or red? Stuffed mushroom cap?" the pitch invariably features the new science building or scholarship program. Not a word about the pregnant political agenda, which is the evident, animating priority of the administration.

Harvard should be honest: "Please give because we are rooted in a great crime and need to pay reparations; we must fight the lawsuits after we shut down your finals club; we need to produce propaganda to correct your views on immigration and policing; we need to pay for additional, identity based graduations; we must recruit the best non-white male professors to teach the new curriculum of grievance; we must revise song books and repaint the crests on buildings as we disavow them."

But why change anything if the cash keeps rolling in? Harvard wants my money, not my opinion.

If Harvard does not support intellectual freedom Harvard is failing. Harvard quartered George Washington's troops and the "Harvard Regiment" of the Civil War sustained extraordinary casualties fighting for this freedom. What would the alumni of the past, builders of the nation as well as the University, think of Harvard today? The redaction of the alma mater is telling. The college's Puritan founders, heroes for individual rights, driven from their homeland by the political correctness of their day, excised by authoritarian fiat. Harvard today is less a great university than a political action committee with a medical school and a hockey team.

True Leadership

I did not send \$10 because I needed to send a message. The Harvard community today is discordant and fracturing. The university would do well to recognize this, reset, and lead again.

Harvard could speak out for free speech as the University of Chicago did. That university's president appointed a committee on freedom of expression that drafted a statement, subsequently adopted by other universities, saying "without a vibrant commitment to free and open inquiry, a university ceases to be a university."

Harvard should cease dictating to adults engaged in private, lawful, freely chosen activities how they may associate. Harry Lewis has it right: “better to stick with the principle on which we have always operated: *Students’ memberships in organizations is their own business, not the College’s. The College responds to improper acts, not memberships.*” (Emphasis in the original.)

If Harvard cared about diversity it would broaden *intellectual* perspectives on campus. Professor Robert P. George and the James Madison Program at Princeton provides an example. If less than 96 percent of the faculty gives to Democrats in the next election, the effort might be succeeding. Harvard might have responded to those “caused discomfort” by house masters as Dr. Everett Piper, president of Oklahoma Wesleyan University, did to a student that felt “victimized” by a Bible reading. He writes “I have a message for this young man and all others who care to listen . . . If you want the chaplain to tell you you’re a victim rather than tell you that you need virtue, this may not be the university you’re looking for . . . This is not a daycare, it’s a university.”

Courage

Fortitude is summoned. In academia today, for institutions and individuals, the brave are those breasting the tide. The University of Chicago and the student defending the right to life on campus are courageous, not those following the politically correct mob.

A university that claims to educate the leaders of the world has a responsibility to prepare its students for *real* challenges—global terrorism, failing infrastructure, income inequality. Every hour Harvard students expend on “discomfort” over a word or an old crest on a building is time wasted to higher purposes, the formation of better citizens and more complete human beings.

I would give more than \$10 to a Harvard worthy of its history and image of itself.

About G. David Bednar

G. David Bednar played high school and college football. He graduated from Harvard with a B.A. in 1987 and an MBA in 1994. He served as an officer in the United States Marine Corps from 1987-1991 and served in Operation Desert Storm. He works in finance in New York City and lives in Connecticut with his wife, three sons, and daughter.