

Dear President Weiss,

We, the undersigned, wish to express our deep disappointment with former President William Bowen's speech at Commencement on Sunday, May 18th. As current students and recent graduates, we are invested in the future of Haverford College and its leadership, and believe that the incidents leading up to, during, and after Commencement can provide important insights as we strive to improve this institution and help it live up to its Quaker values of nonviolence and social justice.

Bowen's remarks stood in stark contrast to the community forum that you called on the matter of Robert Birgeneau's invitation to be honored at Commencement. This was, to our minds, an instance of Haverford at its very best. It was a moment of deeply respectful, open, and thoughtful communication. The forum was a crucial event in the unfolding of this controversy, though it has been largely ignored in recent media coverage. Amidst varying opinions, even strong disagreement, the members of the Haverford community present listened and spoke to one another in mutual trust, concern, and respect. This is a Haverford we hope you are proud of; we certainly are.

Unfortunately, Dr. Bowen chose to address a different aspect of the conversation, overlooking true dialogue in order to scold those who participated in a sincere and justified act of protest. We understand that Dr. Bowen was given permission by you to speak during the time previously allotted to Dr. Birgeneau, and used it to give a speech reprimanding many members of our graduating class at a moment in which we had no power to speak back. It would not be difficult work to dismantle Bowen's speech—to outline how, at regrettably frequent intervals, he disrespected the graduating class and fundamentally ignored the spirit of protest in favor of an opportunity to wag his finger, unopposed, at these "arrogant" kids. That work has been done elsewhere and eloquently, and it is obvious that, at best, Bowen's remarks were poorly timed and inappropriate to the occasion. Our concern in writing this letter is to address what we see as a disconcerting trend: that of the administration paying lip-service to student opinions and dissent, while ultimately excluding or dismissing their voices from decisions that affect the entire Haverford community. This is a loss for our whole community, a real disappointment at a moment where much of the Haverford community felt that the forum represented progress towards our ideals.

Our efforts do not reflect, as so many have asserted, an ignorance of nuance or an extreme naivete. They reflect instead a devotion to Haverford and to the ideals upon which this community is based. Shared governance is central to Haverford's identity as a college, and students' protest around Birgeneau represented an important example of public discourse and civic engagement involving a range of community members. We are invested in Haverford's improvement, and at Commencement we were all witness to the glaring need to promote a relationship between students, faculty, and administration that respects all of our capacities to think and act.

The incidents surrounding Commencement have affected alumni, students, and faculty alike and make a statement about the administration's leadership and valuation of student voice that will continue to affect Haverford in the coming years. We cannot move forward if we do not acknowledge our inadequacies as a college community, and our communications here indicate a genuine commitment to bettering Haverford, even when our opinions are unpopular with those in positions of power. What will you do, in the face of such condescension and cynicism towards student voices, to restore faith in our sense of respect and dialogue, as well as dissent and justice?

Signed,
Rachel Cholst, Class of 2011

Sandeep Dhadvai, Class of 2011
Patrick Phelan, Class of 2011
Sameer Rao, Class of 2011
Diane Tracht, Class of 2011
Meg Bishop, Class of 2012
Yumna Hamid, Class of 2012
Katie Monroe, Class of 2012
Hannah Silverblank, Class of 2012
Natasha Cohen-Carroll, Class of 2013
Alexandra Colón Amil, Class of 2013
Stephen Handlon, Class of 2013
Vanessa Hernandez, Class of 2013
Lucia Kearney, Class of 2013
Rachel Kobasa, Class of 2013
Joshua Mussa, Class of 2013
Jo Vito Ramirez, Class of 2013
Annie Reading, Class of 2013
Benjamin Safran, Class of 2013
Waleed Shahid, Class of 2013
Sally Weathers, Class of 2013
Anjali Baliga, Class of 2014
Hiba Dhanani, Class of 2014
Kathryn Dorn, Class of 2014
Caileigh Feldman, Class of 2014
Samuel Fox, Class of 2014
Ian Gavigan, Class of 2014
Siobhan Hickey, Class of 2014
Nicole Hurd, Class of 2014
Alex Jacobs, Class of 2014
Ariel Levin, Class of 2014
Siena Mann, Class of 2014
Emily Mayer, Class of 2014
Julia Neumann, Class of 2014
Jordan Nieusma, Class of 2014
Kate O'Brien, Class of 2014
Celia Ristow, Class of 2014
Michael Rushmore, Class of 2014
Kelsey Ryan, Class of 2014
Patrick Williams, Class of 2014
Dan Wriggins, Class of 2014
Alicja Kielczewska, Class of 2015
David Cookmeyer, Class of 2016
Laura Newman Eckstein, Class of 2016
Luke Jensen, Class of 2016
Geoffrey Martin-Noble, Class of 2016
Kat Poje, Class of 2016
Dylan Reichman, Class of 2016
Andrew Szczurek, Class of 2016
Sam Warren, Class of 2016

Nora Weathers, Class of 2016
Morgana Warner-Evans, Class of 2016
Ethan Adelman-Sil, Class of 2016/17
Peter Durlacher, Class of 2017
Andrew Glaser, Class of 2017