

Dear Dr. Birgeneau,

President Weiss has told us that you exemplify “ideals we hold dearly at Haverford.” Haverford College was founded by Quakers, and even today we speak of “Quaker values” as central to our identity. Our school has a history of supporting activism, pacifism and anti-violence work. We also have a longstanding honor code guided by principles of “mutual trust, concern, and respect.” These are Haverfordian ideals. The use of force is not among them.

Many of us admire the work you have done on issues such as LGBT rights, affordable education and the plight of undocumented students. For these efforts and your scholarly work, we would welcome you at Haverford College as a Commencement speaker and honorary degree recipient.

We are, however, deeply disturbed by the events at UC Berkeley on November, 9th, 2011, as well as your statements that followed. They do not seem to fit with our values that see peace and community as things we must build in every moment. You supported UC Berkeley police in the use of extreme force against non-violent protesters, asserted that linking arms is not a form of non-violent protest, and suggested that the protesters got exactly what they were looking for. We doubt that any of those peaceful protesters were looking for broken ribs.

As current Haverford students and Berkeley alums, many of whom participated in Occupy protests, the events of November 9th have a personal resonance. Under slightly different circumstances and if we had been so brave, it could have been us beaten with batons while protesting non-violently. As a community standing in solidarity with non-violent protestors across the country, we are extremely uncomfortable honoring you. To do so would be a disservice to those non-violent protesters who were beaten and whose actions you dismissed as “unfortunate,” as if they brought the abuse upon themselves.

Your brief apology, nearly two weeks after the incident and only after BAMN (The Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action, Integration, and Immigrant Rights and Fight for Equality By Any Means Necessary) announced their intentions to sue you, is inadequate. While you say that you “sincerely apologize for the events of November 9” and “take full responsibility for these events,” it seems you do not want to admit wrongdoing or take responsibility in court. You are still named in BAMN’s lawsuit, which Berkeley had been fighting by trying to get you removed from and is now fighting by claiming that the actions of yourself and the Berkeley police were justified.

Even the Police Review Board report you commissioned acknowledges that the linking of arms as occurred on November 9th was not a violent act. And yet, we can only find examples of you describing arm-linking as not non-violent protest. That same report also concludes that the Protest Response Team principles developed after November 9th are only “a positive first step, but should be clarified and expanded in significant detail.”

When trust is violated in our community, we seek to restore our bonds through restorative, not punitive, processes. Restoration involves a full accounting of one's violation, and, ultimately, we return to wholeness through action. In the spirit of these restorative processes, before you are honored by our community, we believe it is necessary for you to do more than offer a brief apology. We ask you to use this opportunity to take responsibility for the events of November 9th not just by apologizing with words, but by taking substantive action.

Thus, we urge you to publicly:

- Pledge to lead efforts to retrain campus police officers to respond to protests in a more responsible manner,
- Pledge to become a policy leader in how universities ensure that protesters' rights are respected,
- Support reparations for the victims of the November 9th beatings and arrests,
- State that police unjustifiably used excessive force and made false arrests on November 9th,
- State that you played an instrumental role in the police actions of November 9th,
- State that linking arms is not a form of violent protest and that protesters on November 9th were not acting violently,
- Apologize for ordering police to continue using batons against non-violent protesters,
- Support student representation on Berkeley's Protest Response Team and any similar teams that you work to create at other universities,
- Write an open letter to Haverford students explaining your position on the events of November 9th, what you learned from them, how you have put what you learned into practice and how your actions have or have not been in line with the values of peace, non-violence, and political participation.

Based on your long career of public service, we have reason to hope that you will take our requests to heart. As you wrote in 2003 regarding LGBT rights on college campuses, "I believe that as an institution of higher education, we have an obligation to show leadership in areas where the general public may lag behind." Once again, you have an opportunity and obligation to show leadership. We invite you to seize it.

If you choose not to confront the issues before you, we will have no other option than to call for the college to withdraw its invitation. We urge you to respond positively and forthrightly to this letter. We look forward to a response by May 9th.

Sincerely,

Taha Ahsin, Haverford College 2014
Ben Bergman, Haverford College 2014
Brian Brown, Haverford College 2014
Allison First, Haverford College 2014
Ian Gavigan, Haverford College 2014

Daniel Gordon, Haverford College 2014
Nicole Hurd, Haverford College 2014
Jonathan Laks, Haverford College 2014
Ariel Levin, Haverford College 2014
Siena Mann, Haverford College 2014
Emily Mayer, Haverford College 2014
Adam Morollo, Haverford College 2014
Gregory Nisbet, Haverford College 2014
Paul Raccuglia, Haverford College 2014
Brian Rucker, Haverford College 2014
Michael Rushmore, Haverford College 2014
Kelsey Ryan, Haverford College 2014
Thy Vo, Haverford College 2014
Patrick Williams, Haverford College 2014
Helen Wistman, Haverford College 2014
Dan Wriggins, Haverford College 2014
Ruthie Cartwright, Haverford College 2015
Michael De Wolf, Haverford College 2015
Ryan Gilliom, Haverford College 2015
Dawit Habtemariam, Haverford College 2015
Alicja Kielczewska, Haverford College 2015
Shelby Lyons, Haverford College 2015
Shahzeen Nasim, Haverford College 2015
Nicholas Seltzer, Haverford College 2015
Marilyn Baffoe-Bonnie, Haverford College 2016
Joshua Bulos, Haverford College 2016
Luke Jensen, Haverford College 2016
Alison Marqusee, Haverford College 2016
Katherine Poje, Haverford College 2016
Dylan Reichman, Haverford College 2016
Charles Szczurek, Haverford College 2016
Levi Bowers, Haverford College 2017
Ana Colon Garcia, Haverford College 2017
Will Holden, Haverford College 2017
Ben Miltenberg, Haverford College 2017
Can Mutlu, Haverford College 2017
Tionney Nix, Haverford College 2017
Hiram Ruiz, Haverford College 2017
Aidan Snyder, Haverford College 2017
Kathryn Sommer, Haverford College 2017
Jeremy Waterkotte, Haverford College 2017
Seung Yu, Haverford College 2017

Maud Burnett McInerney, Berkeley PhD 1993, Associate Professor and Chair, Department of English, Haverford College

John Muse, Berkeley PhD 2007, Visiting Assistant Professor, Independent College Programs, Haverford College

Jill Stauffer, Berkeley PhD 2003, Assistant Professor of Peace, Justice and Human Rights, Haverford College