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Encampment in Harvard Yard

Dear Members of the Harvard Community,

Over the last 12 days, the encampment in Harvard Yard has disrupted our educational activities and operations. The right to free speech, including protest and dissent, is vital to the work of the research university. **But it is not unlimited (<https://provost.harvard.edu/university-wide-statement-rights-and-responsibilities>)**. It must be exercised in a time, place, and manner that respects the right of our community members to do their work, pursue their education, and enjoy the opportunities that a residential campus has to offer. The encampment favors the voices of a few over the rights of many who have experienced disruption in how they learn and work at a critical time of the semester. I call on those participating in the encampment to end the occupation of Harvard Yard.

The disruptions from this encampment at the heart of the University have been numerous. Harvard College exams and other important activities and events have had to move elsewhere. Safety concerns over the past two weeks, including those raised as a result of students sleeping outdoors overnight, have required us to sharply limit access to Harvard Yard. Although some community members have said they are undisturbed by these conditions, we continue to hear reports of students whose ability to sleep, study, and move freely about the campus has been disrupted by the actions of the protesters. We are especially troubled by increasing reports that some within, and some supporting, the encampment have intimidated and harassed other members of our community. When Harvard staff have requested to see IDs in order to enforce our policies, supporters of the encampment have at times yelled at them, tried to encircle them, and otherwise interfered with their work. We have also received reports that passers-by have been confronted, surveilled, and followed. Such actions are indefensible and unacceptable.

As first-year students move out and as we begin our extensive preparations for Commencement, this ongoing violation of our policies becomes more consequential. Thousands of family members, friends, and loved ones will soon join us to celebrate the achievements of graduate and undergraduate students who have earned the right to walk in Commencement. This celebration is the culmination of years of hard work and accomplishment. The members of the Class of 2024 deserve to enjoy this milestone uninterrupted and unimpeded. It would be especially painful if students who

graduated from high school or college during the pandemic were denied a full graduation ceremony for a second time.

The individuals participating in the activities of the encampment have been informed repeatedly that violations of University and School policies will be subject to disciplinary consequences and that further violations and continued escalation will result in increasingly severe sanctions. Last week, faculties across the University began delivering disciplinary notices to students who continued to participate in unauthorized, disruptive activity in the Yard despite these notices.

I write today with this simple message: **The continuation of the encampment presents a significant risk to the educational environment of the University. Those who participate in or perpetuate its continuation will be referred for involuntary leave from their Schools.** Among other implications, students placed on involuntary leave may not be able to sit for exams, may not continue to reside in Harvard housing, and must cease to be present on campus until reinstated.

Enforcement of these policies, which are essential to our educational mission, is an obligation we owe to our students and the Harvard community more broadly. It is not, as some have suggested, a rejection of discussion and debate about the urgent issues that concern the University, the nation, and the world. As an academic institution, we do not shy away from hard and important questions. There are many ways for our community to engage constructively in reasoned discussion of complex issues, but initiating these difficult and crucial conversations does not require, or justify, interfering with the educational environment and Harvard's academic mission. Our disagreements are most effectively addressed through candid, constructive dialogue, building not on disruption, but on facts and reason.

Sincerely,
Alan M. Garber

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