

*Note:* The National Association of Scholars has been engaged since September 2011 in an in-depth study of Bowdoin College. Our full report based on that study will be published in April 2013. Prior to its release we are posting material on Bowdoin that offers some important additional context and detail.

## **Bowdoin College**

Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, is one of the nation's leading liberal arts colleges. Founded in 1794 and opened in 1802, Bowdoin has a rich history that matches much of the history of the republic. In its earliest days, when Maine was still part of Massachusetts, Bowdoin was a college that served the rural populace of the region, including some of New England's growing class of prosperous merchants and "local elites," but more than half the students were impoverished and relied on a combination of charity, seasonable jobs, and sharing expenses through "boarding clubs."<sup>1</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne attended Bowdoin from 1821 to 1825, as did Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1822–1825) and Franklin Pierce (1820–1824). In 1871, Joshua Chamberlain became Bowdoin's sixth president. A hero of Gettysburg and governor of Maine from 1866 to 1869, Chamberlain gave the college national ambitions.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Bowdoin was notable for maintaining a strict model of classical education. Beginning in 1963, the college turned away from this approach and embarked instead on innovations in the curriculum, student residence, and eventually every aspect of college life. Bowdoin today is the product of this half-century of innovation, which continues.

## **An Independent Study**

The National Association of Scholars' study of Bowdoin is independent of the college. The Bowdoin administration and faculty have not endorsed, participated in, or cooperated with our research, and bear no responsibility for our findings.

When we began this study, we proposed to Bowdoin's president, Barry Mills, that Bowdoin and NAS pursue this work collaboratively. President Mills did not answer. As we

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<sup>1</sup>David F. Allmendinger Jr., *Paupers and Scholars: The Transformation of Student Life in Nineteenth-Century New England* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), 12. Charles Dorn, "From 'Liberal Professions' to 'Lucrative Professions': Bowdoin College, Stanford University, and the Civic Functions of Higher Education," *Teachers College Record* 113, no. 7 (July 2011): 1571, 1574–75.

proceeded we encountered numerous reminders that, officially, Bowdoin wanted nothing to do with our study.

Bowdoin's noncooperation has meant that some subjects on which we would have liked to know more have remained off-limits. We did not have access to contemporary financial data, personnel records, and other such data that would be properly considered confidential. We also had limited access to faculty members and no access to administrators. In numerous cases, students who had agreed to talk with us reconsidered and cancelled appointments.

These limitations led us to concentrate more on documentary records, which were abundant, than on firsthand statements from participants in the Bowdoin community. We take this as a strength of the report: it is based almost entirely on material in the public record.

## Purpose

The National Association of Scholars undertook this study as an attempt to create a new way of examining contemporary liberal arts education in the United States. What's new is our use of an in-depth historic and ethnographic approach to chart what a college welcomes, what it teaches, what it omits, what it excludes, and how it reached these decisions. Our original question, *What Does Bowdoin Teach?* embraced the undergraduate curriculum, the world of extracurricular programs, sports, residence life, religion, student government, free time and informal student relations, faculty-student relationships, and campus culture. Our premise is that what a college "teaches"—Bowdoin or any other school—comprises a lot more than what appears on course syllabi or what happens in the classroom. The whole of college life at a small residential school informs students, teaching them directly in some cases, teaching them indirectly in others. The indirect parts are no less important and in some cases more long-lasting and profound for those immersed in them.

Some parts of a college education are surely accidental. Students form lifelong friendships (as did Hawthorne and Pierce), fall in love, or discover unexpected affinities for subjects they never planned to study. But much of college education is planned or even meticulously designed, and some of what appears to students to be matters of personal discovery are in fact shaped by the college's way of doing things. Bowdoin presents its students with many choices, but the menu of options is closely constrained.

How constrained? That goes to the heart of why we began this study and why, of the 228 selective liberal arts colleges in the United States, we chose Bowdoin.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>The number "228" is taken from the 2000 edition of *The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education*, and represents the total of colleges then classified as "Liberal Arts I." Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, *The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education: 2000 Edition* (Menlo Park, CA: Carnegie Foundation for the

## The Backdrop

We chose Bowdoin because of a particular circumstance and a particular question.

On September 2, 2010, Barry Mills, the fourteenth president of Bowdoin, gave a convocation address in Pikard Theater in which he proposed “to present questions for which I don’t have the answers.”<sup>3</sup> One of those questions was “How can we justify the cost?” of the college. Another was, “Why spend all that money to send their sons and daughters to a place where the education will break family bonds and where the ideals are inconsistent with their family and community values?” The third question—and the important one for us—was, “Should I care that many believe Bowdoin’s values don’t represent the views of so many in our country?”

In pursuing this third question, Mills acknowledged that the college is, “in the main, a place of liberal political persuasion,” and “elite education is dominated by liberal perspectives.” He thought it would be good for Bowdoin to:

be willing and more active in bringing to this community recognized and accomplished scholars—as visitors or tenure-track professors—who engage their disciplines, academic work, and artistic work with perspective different from the conventional wisdom at Bowdoin or on other campuses. This different perspective will energize our classrooms and the intellectual life of our faculty and our community.

In his address, however, Mills was unable to explain how this “willing and more active” approach should play out. He offered instead a stricture on what Bowdoin should *not* do:

There should never be a time when we have a political litmus test for faculty or even inquire about political persuasion.

Mills illustrated his points with a series of anecdotes. To exemplify the problem that outside observers view Bowdoin as veering too far in the direction of progressive politics, he told a story about a golf game he had recently played with a wealthy graduate of Williams College who

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Advancement of Teaching, 2001), 20,

[http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/downloads/2000\\_edition\\_data\\_printable.pdf](http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/downloads/2000_edition_data_printable.pdf).

<sup>3</sup>Barry Mills, “Convocation 2012 Address,” Bowdoin College, Brunswick, ME, September 2, 2010, <http://www.bowdoin.edu/president/speeches/2010/convocation-2010.shtml>. All quotations within the text are taken from this transcript of President Mills’s address.

combined boorish behavior on the golf course with expression of disdain about Bowdoin's commitment to racial diversity. According to Mills, his golf opponent proclaimed:

I would never support Bowdoin—you are a ridiculous liberal school that brings all the wrong students to campus for all the wrong reasons.

And:

I would never support Bowdoin or Williams (his alma mater) because of all your misplaced and misguided diversity efforts.

The point of the story seemed to be that the critics of Bowdoin's liberal bias are foolish, but Mills was unwilling to dismiss them entirely:

My guess is that some among you think that what I describe is a non-issue. It is my overreaction to this "Glenn Beck, Sarah Palin moment" in our history. But I don't think that's what I am reacting to. And given our economy and the uncertainty in our nation, this is not a time to be sanguine about the reputation or standing of any institution in America just because it has been held in high regard.

Mills, as he said at the outset of his address, offered no solution to this problem, only a portrait of a critic as a man with poor manners and what Mills judges to be ignorant social attitudes.

## **Playing Golf**

Though Mills never named the character in his story, the man he lampooned soon heard about the speech. That man, New York businessman and philanthropist Tom Klingenstein, is a somewhat unlikely fit with the portrait Mills offered. A former Peace Corp volunteer and chairman of an environmental conservation organization in Maine, Klingenstein is also chairman of the Claremont Institute—a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting the "study of statesmanship and political philosophy"—and a strong advocate of liberal education.

Klingenstein responded to Mills's convocation speech with an essay, "A Golf Story," published in the Winter 2010–Spring 2011 *Claremont Review of Books*.<sup>4</sup> Klingenstein disputed Mills's account of what happened during their golf match and denied saying what Mills attributed to him. He also took the occasion to respond to Mills's larger points, and noted evidence that the political commitments of the Bowdoin faculty may well influence the content and the quality of the college's curriculum. Klingenstein took particular exception to the history curriculum, stating:

Wanting to give [Mills] the benefit of the doubt...I took a look at Bowdoin's American history offerings....There are any number of courses that deal with some group aspect of America, but virtually none that deals with America as a whole. For example, there is African-American history from 1619 to 1865 and from 1865 to the present, but there is not a comparable sequence on America. Every course is social or cultural history that looks at the world through the prism of race, class, and gender. Even a course on the environment (offered in the history department) "examines the links between ecology and race, class, and gender." Do Bowdoin alumni know their alma mater offers not one history course in American political, military, diplomatic, constitutional, or intellectual history, and nothing at all on the American Founding or the Constitution; that the one Civil War course is essentially African-American history (it is offered also in Africana Studies); and that there are more courses on gay and lesbian subjects than on American history? Is it possible this is one reason why some conservatives are disinclined to send their children to Bowdoin?<sup>5</sup>

Klingenstein concluded that Mills's professed interest in achieving greater intellectual diversity at Bowdoin, voiced in the convocation address, was not intellectually serious. How could Mills be serious about bringing conservative voices to Bowdoin, Klingenstein asked, if they sounded anything like the "backswing interrupting, Bowdoin-hating boor" that Mills described? Klingenstein concluded:

Overall, I take Mills's golf tale to be a retraction of his stated desire to increase the diversity of views on campus. After all, how can Bowdoin reasonably be expected to accommodate the unsavory views of the unsporting jerk he described?<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Thomas D. Klingenstein, "A Golf Story," *The Claremont Review of Books* 51, nos. 1 and 2 (Winter 2010–Spring 2011): 108–110,

[http://www.claremont.org/repository/doclib/20110407\\_PDFforauthorsKlingenstein.pdf](http://www.claremont.org/repository/doclib/20110407_PDFforauthorsKlingenstein.pdf).

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 110.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 109.

## Bowdoin's First Responses

Mills did not publicly respond to Klingenstein's article, but it nevertheless elicited a number of responses from the Bowdoin community, in the student newspaper, the *Bowdoin Orient*, and in *BCURIA* (an online forum with access restricted to those on the Bowdoin campus), most written in defense of both Mills and Bowdoin.

The *Bowdoin Orient* broke the story about Klingenstein's article on April 15, 2011. Scott Hood, Bowdoin's vice president for communications and public affairs, is quoted as saying, "At Convocation in September, President Mills expressed his views on a number of subjects. Mr. Klingenstein has a different view."<sup>7</sup> This was the only official response from the Bowdoin administration. It seemed to leave Mills as standing behind his version of what happened during the golf match as well as on the broader question of Bowdoin's commitment to intellectual diversity.

Two Class of 2012 students, Sean McElroy and Alex Williams, characterized Klingenstein's article as "a personal attack on President Mills and Bowdoin College," describing his comments "as both condescending and factually incorrect."<sup>8</sup> They cited courses offered in the government and education departments as complementing the offerings in history. McElroy and Williams seemed undecided about whether they were arguing that the curriculum is unbiased or that the curriculum is indeed biased but such bias doesn't get in the way of fair-minded inquiry:

[W]e find no reason that a scholar on African-American history cannot be conservative in his or her political views. And there is no reason that a course on constitutional or political history cannot have a liberal bias. Rather, we view good historians as driven by intellectual questions rather than political motivations.<sup>9</sup>

McElroy and Williams viewed Klingenstein's strictures as superficial, the result of "skimming the College's course catalogue." And they praised Mills for encouraging "intellectual freedom and excellence at Bowdoin."<sup>10</sup>

On April 22, 2011, Bowdoin associate professor of history Patrick Rael posted an extensive comment on BCuria.com saying that Klingenstein was "pretty misinformed not just

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<sup>7</sup>Nick Daniels and Linda Kinstler, "Essay in Claremont Review Rips Barry Mills' Convocation Speech," *Bowdoin Orient*, April 15, 2011, <http://bowdoinorient.com/article/6353>.

<sup>8</sup>Sean McElroy and Alex Williams, "Klingenstein's Article Gives an Inaccurate Account of Bowdoin Curriculum," *Bowdoin Orient*, April 22, 2011, <http://bowdoinorient.com/article/6383>.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

about what the History Department does, but also about what a liberal arts education is for.”<sup>11</sup> He compared Klingenstein to the conservative activist David Horowitz and argued that Bowdoin’s history department has “an enormous amount of intellectual diversity.” Rael argued that Bowdoin faculty members do not “turn the classroom into a platform for indoctrinating students,” but devote themselves to “coaching students toward critical thought.” Politics, he allowed, does sometimes enter the classroom, but Bowdoin faculty members are scrupulous about how that happens:

This does not mean that politics never intrudes into our teaching. But it does mean that this concern is ever-present in our minds: we ruminate over it, investigate it, and theorize about it. And we seek to inculcate in our students an appreciation for the ways politics informs our scholarship *even when we ourselves are making cases*. (Emphasis in original)

Rael appended a letter to the editor he submitted to the *Claremont Review of Books* making these points in more detail and in more emphatic language: Klingenstein’s article is “nothing more than inflammatory, fear-mongering rhetoric,” “erroneous assumptions,” and “egregiously sloppy thinking in the service of scoring cheap rhetorical points.”

In Bowdoin’s defense, Rael explained that

[t]he point of a liberal arts education, after all, is not indoctrination, but it’s the opposite: to help students develop the critical thinking skills necessary to responsibly confront an ever-expanding world of data and arguments. I do not care if my students agree with me, just as I do not care what they argue. I care *how* they argue. My commitment, which my colleagues share, is nothing more than helping my students think for themselves.

Rael thought it “unlikely that any words I offer here will change the minds of those who’ve made them up without the encumbrance of inconvenient things like facts,” but he nonetheless offered the possibility of dialogue: “For now, suffice it for me to invite anyone reading this to broach the difficult conversations with us.”

In contrast to Rael, Jean Yarbrough, Bowdoin’s Gary M. Pendy, Sr. Professor of Social Sciences, affirmed Klingenstein’s assessment in the April 22 *Bowdoin Orient*: “Now it is time for

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<sup>11</sup>Because access to this site is restricted to members of the Bowdoin community, no link to this posting is available.

President Mills to think about how we can promote greater political and intellectual diversity on campus and make ourselves an even better college.”<sup>12</sup> Yarbrough noted:

In his essay, Mr. Klingenstein estimates that the actual number of conservative/Republican faculty is 4 percent. I do not know how he arrived at that number, but using figures from the Bowdoin College profile at the website CollegeData, there are 177 faculty engaged in the full-time teaching of undergraduates, 4 percent of which would equal seven. I have not made a scientific study of this, but that number, small as it is, strikes me as too high.<sup>13</sup>

Professor Rael responded to Yarbrough in an April 29 letter to the editor, and while he left her statistical assessment unchallenged, he reiterated his earlier points and challenged her view that Bowdoin is deficient in intellectual diversity or that its degree of political diversity is relevant.<sup>14</sup> Rael wrote:

Bowdoin courses cover an immense range of subjects, times and perspectives. Students engage innumerable approaches to questions of aesthetics, religion, philosophy, nature, society and other topics foundational to a broad humanities education....As for “political” diversity, I have no idea about the views held by Bowdoin professors. Nor do I care, unless some use their classrooms to promote political advocacy over critical thinking.

Like Mills, Rael also rejected the idea (not argued by Yarbrough) that faculty members should be hired “on the basis of personal political belief.” Faculty members should be hired instead on the basis of their “intellectual commitments” because:

Scholars care first about the principles that set scholarship apart from punditry: accuracy in using evidence, rigor in collecting data, fairness in evaluating arguments and honesty in presenting findings.

Responsible educators do not subordinate their teaching to their political concerns; they equip their students with the tools necessary to evaluate the merits of

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<sup>12</sup>Jean Yarbrough, “Bowdoin Should Examine Its Lack of Diversity,” *Bowdoin Orient*, April 22, 2011, <http://bowdoinorient.com/article/6388>.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Patrick Rael, “Yarbrough Inaccurately Depicts College Diversity,” letter to the editor, *Bowdoin Orient*, April 29, 2011, <http://bowdoinorient.com/article/6428>.

competing positions. Most of what we teach at Bowdoin is about communicating in a way that rises above the shouting that consumes the public forum. This is how we serve—by modeling modes of discourse that offer more than what can be had on cable news and talk radio.<sup>15</sup>

Rael's comments elicited several responses on the *Bowdoin Orient* website. In particular, Steven Robinson (Class of 2011), a conservative student, found Rael's claims ironic. According to Robinson, Rael was combative in the classroom and frequently forced him to defend "Bush era policies and Guantanamo bay" in a course on "United States History in the 19th century." Robinson recalled:

He ridiculed me, on the very first day of classes, for proclaiming that I was taking his class because "I love America."<sup>16</sup>

Rael responded by assuring Robinson that his class work was never "evaluated on the basis of your own personal belief." He defended his right to express his own viewpoints and challenge the beliefs of students on the basis that they would have otherwise "received a poor education." Rael, however, clarified his reason for not taking the "charges" of conservatives seriously: "It seems to me that these ubiquitous charges that conservatives are oppressed for their beliefs come in rather bad grace from those who so consistently denounce cries of victimhood on the part of the historically marginalized."<sup>17</sup> Rael likened conservatives who complain of liberal bias in the academy to "social Darwinists" who cynically play the role of the "oppressed minority" when they find themselves in a position of weakness.<sup>18</sup>

In its April 22 issue, the *Bowdoin Orient* ran the letters by McElroy and Williams and by Yarbrough as well as a letter from Miles Pope (Class of 2009) and an article summarizing a variety of faculty responses.

Pope wrote of Klingenstein's questions, "Who cares?"<sup>19</sup> Reflecting on his Bowdoin education, he said that its goal was "knowing what you're talking about, which is precisely why it has nothing to do with partisan politics." He dismissed Klingenstein's emphasis on the importance of the *Federalist Papers* as, in effect, a pitch for hiring "Republican professors"—calling it "a kind of indiscriminate invocation of the Framers that is rote practice among

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Miles Pope, "Political Beliefs Do Not Impede with Teaching," letter to the editor, *Bowdoin Orient*, April 22, 2011, <http://bowdoinorient.com/article/6390>.

hacks,”—and contrasted this with how “educated people” would interpret the document. Pope concluded: “Though the real question, which answers itself, is about the advisability of taking intellectual cues from someone slinging this slop.”<sup>20</sup>

The *Bowdoin Orient*’s own account of the controversy quoted (in addition to Rael) Allen Springer, professor of government, who observed: “For me, whether someone is political or conservative or has a particular political bent is far less important than how effective they are at teaching and allowing and, in fact, encouraging these different perspectives.”<sup>21</sup> And Peter Coviello, professor of English, said “to comment at all is to grant the *Claremont Review* piece a seriousness that it does not in any degree warrant.”<sup>22</sup>

### The Conversation Continues

Klingenstein responded to his critics in an article in the *Bowdoin Orient* on April 29, 2011.<sup>23</sup> He argued that the readily available evidence, such as party affiliation, suggested that Bowdoin College has little “intellectual diversity.” But he also agreed with his critics, observing that counting “Republican noses” may not be “the best measure of what I am calling ‘intellectual diversity.’” He defined that term as referring to the existence within a community of

a range of views on ‘foundational’ beliefs and assumptions, such as: whether there is such a thing as human nature (or gender differences determined by nature); whether there are moral truths or just contingent values; whether tolerance is the highest virtue; whether America is a mosaic of groups or a collection of individuals joined by creed and culture; whether America should strive to transcend race or celebrate it; and whether America and the West have been, on balance, a source of good or evil.<sup>24</sup>

This idea of intellectual diversity contrasts with the rationale framed by Professor Rael in the same issue of the *Bowdoin Orient*. Rael argued that Bowdoin’s achievement of intellectual diversity was manifest in the “immense range of subjects, times and perspectives” in Bowdoin courses and the “innumerable approaches to questions of aesthetics, religion, philosophy, nature, society and other topics foundational to a broad humanities education.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Claire Aaseon, “Professors React to Charges Levied in Claremont Review,” *Bowdoin Orient*, April 22, 2011, <http://bowdoinorient.com/article/6392>.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Thomas Klingenstein, “Klingenstein Defends Claremont Review Essay, Responds to Criticism,” *Bowdoin Orient*, April 29, 2011, <http://bowdoinorient.com/article/6421>.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Rael, “Yarbrough Inaccurately Depicts College Diversity.”

The disagreement was plainly philosophical. Klingenstein argued that real intellectual diversity consists of people joined in community but upholding conflicting views on foundational issues. Rael argued that real intellectual diversity inheres in the range of topics and the number of approaches.

Klingenstein allowed that while he suspected that Bowdoin faculty members have very similar views on foundational issues, his “suspicions” counted for little and ought to be “put to the test by further study of the curriculum, student life, faculty attitudes and the like.” He agreed that studying the course catalog would take an observer only a small part of the way to understanding the college, and that deeper study would be required.

Klingenstein also observed that the sorts of biases he suspected might be found at Bowdoin would not take the form of open declarations of animus:

There are no “Conservatives Need Not Apply” signs at Bowdoin, but bias, as we have learned from other contexts, often operates by means that are subtle and indirect—sometimes even unconsciously.

Klingenstein concluded by saying that he hoped his original essay might

encourage the Bowdoin family to take steps to increase intellectual diversity. This, of course, is up to Bowdoin, but I remain ready to support such an effort in any way within my means.<sup>26</sup>

This was soon put to the test.

## **The Diversity Debate**

In early May 2011 a group of Bowdoin students invited Klingenstein to campus to speak. Klingenstein accepted and was joined by Peter Wood, president of the National Association of Scholars and principal investigator for this report. Together they spoke to (and with) a mixed group of students and faculty members on May 16, 2011. President Mills was invited but declined to attend.

This public exchange raised more questions than it answered. Klingenstein and Wood pointed to apparent gaps in Bowdoin’s curriculum. They argued that graduates of a good liberal arts college ought to have a better grounding in Western and American history, among other

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<sup>26</sup>Klingenstein, “Klingenstein Defends Claremont Review Essay.”

subjects, than seemed the norm for Bowdoin graduates. Some students in the audience countered that Bowdoin students acquire all that is needed of these subjects in high school. One student said that he had taken the Advanced Placement United States History Exam and he knew the full extent of the subject before enrolling in college. He challenged Klingenstein: “Ask me any question on American history and I will *ace* it.” According to this student’s view, he and his classmates begin their studies at Bowdoin having already achieved a grounding in core knowledge sufficient to allow them to explore a curriculum rich in more specialized offerings.

Wood responded that Bowdoin students, in the midst of their studies, are not in a good position to judge what they might be missing. Lacking access to courses that offer broad overviews of subjects and immersed in courses that focus on narrowly defined periods of history or themes, Wood said, Bowdoin students are deprived of the basis to recognize what the curriculum leaves out and how it emphasizes or privileges some perspectives at the expense of others.

Some of the Bowdoin students strongly denied Wood’s point, saying that the curriculum had provided them with ample means to engage in “critical thinking” and that they stood in an excellent position to make good and informed decisions about their studies. One student flatly rejected the possibility that any subject of substance and importance was absent from Bowdoin’s curriculum and challenged Wood to name one meaningful course or topic that was missing.

After this public event, Klingenstein and Wood conferred. Klingenstein observed that what had emerged from the exchanges with students was a factual dispute. Many of the students who spoke up claimed that Bowdoin’s curriculum was—contrary to Klingenstein’s contention in “A Golf Story”—unaffected by political bias. Many of these students also claimed that, contrary to Klingenstein and Wood, Bowdoin’s curriculum was reasonably thorough for the purposes of liberal arts education. Klingenstein and Wood, however, could point to the official course offerings and degree requirements as evidence that ideological bias was in play in shaping the curriculum and that, as one result, large and important areas of knowledge existed that a Bowdoin student under most circumstances would fail to study as an undergraduate. Is a Bowdoin education in some sense compromised by the political ideologies espoused by a large majority of Bowdoin’s faculty? Is Bowdoin’s curriculum to some degree intellectually compromised by an emphasis on courses that give inordinate weight to race, class, gender, and other themes derived from identity politics? Is the result of this thematic emphasis a failure to pay adequate attention to larger historical, philosophical, and humanistic concerns?

After the public exchange on May 16, several Bowdoin students wrote to Klingenstein and a cordial exchange ensued. Two students sent especially detailed comments on the public event. One, a junior and one of the students who had criticized Klingenstein in the *Bowdoin Orient*, wrote to say that he agreed that “it is important for [Bowdoin] professors and college officials to reach out to conservatives, more so than we have been doing,” but challenged Klingenstein on several points. He thought Klingenstein was inconsistent in asserting in “A Golf Story” that Bowdoin’s curriculum “deprived students of the intellectual diversity necessary for

the development of critical thinking,” but then arguing in the public forum that Bowdoin should *not* appoint faculty members on “the basis of political persuasion.” The student also asked Klingenstein, “What courses [do you think] are missing from our curriculum?” He listed some courses that he thought would refute Klingenstein’s contention about the lack of intellectual diversity, but concluded:

All that being said, I think that you can still make a case that we are missing certain courses in our curriculum and certain viewpoints in our faculty. I think that the situation is very complex, however, and requires a much more careful analysis.

Finally, the student observed that “conservatives may label an idea that is unappealing as ‘liberal’ to marginalize it, and vice versa with liberals. This is undoubtedly more common with liberals within the academy, but the idea can apply anywhere.”

In this case, the student labeled himself as “a liberal” (“I am and have always been”), as an individual intent on seeking a Ph.D. in the sciences, and as someone “concerned” about the future of higher education, which he saw as jeopardized by a growing skepticism among a public less willing to support “scholarly research” and more interested in preparing “people for the workforce.” This student also made a strenuous effort to be open-minded about Klingenstein’s critique, but remained in certain respects baffled by Klingenstein’s argument. Where Klingenstein argued for the value of a college curriculum that conveyed a deep diversity of ideas, the student saw only a complaint about the limited number of “viewpoints” on campus. And where Klingenstein argued that a faculty dominated by a single political outlook was necessarily too narrow to carry forward the goals of liberal education, the student saw only the logic of someone calling for the balance of the political Left with the political Right.

The other notable email came from a senior (self-identified as “a finance guy”) who offered seven lengthy comments in the hope of showing Klingenstein that their positions were “not all that irreconcilable.” He acknowledged that Bowdoin is “a hostile environment” for “someone with your political views.” He then argued that (1) emphasis on athletics lowers academic standards at Bowdoin as much as racial preferences in general admissions does; (2) the discussion would be improved if both sides desisted from political caricatures; (3) racial preferences in college admissions are an impatient way to deal with the larger problem of persistent racial disparities in K–12 education; (4) more emphasis on K–12 reform and less criticism of current policies at the college level would be better; (5) the dropout rate of black students at Bowdoin differs significantly from that of nonminority students; (6) high taxes on rich people are probably a better way to finance social programs than relying on private philanthropy; and (7) multiculturalist courses at Bowdoin left him “thinking better of western civilization and even America.”

This student's email allowed for grounds of legitimate criticism of Bowdoin while providing a closely-argued justification for Bowdoin's overall approach to liberal education. His email, however, was the only statement by a Bowdoin student that demonstrated any significant openness to the issues that Klingenstein and Wood raised. If these questions were to be asked at all, it would probably require a systematic inquiry by a third party.

In the weeks that followed, Wood proposed to Klingenstein that the National Association of Scholars undertake that kind of inquiry. Klingenstein agreed to fund it. Klingenstein then wrote to President Mills inviting him to participate in the study, but his letter went unanswered. The National Association of Scholars began its research in September 2011.

### **The Project Begins**

On October 14, 2011, the *Bowdoin Orient* ran both a news story and an editorial about the National Association of Scholars' study.<sup>27</sup> On October 28, the paper published an opinion essay by Sean McElroy, student co-author of the April 22 essay characterizing Klingenstein's *Claremont Review* article as "a personal attack on President Mills and Bowdoin College."<sup>28</sup>

The news story gave a brief and accurate account of the purposes of the study. The editorial dismissed the study as failing to recognize "the critical thinking abilities of Bowdoin students."<sup>29</sup> McElroy characterized the study as "insulting" and as an "attack" on Bowdoin, asserting that the study could not be fair in light of Klingenstein's funding.<sup>30</sup>

Wood responded in the *Bowdoin Orient* on November 4, defending the National Association of Scholars' commitment to intellectual rigor and fairness and to the liberal arts. He wrote:

In the case of the Bowdoin study, we hypothesize that certain core beliefs at Bowdoin are rarely challenged because there is very little exposure to competing beliefs. It is true that these core beliefs (for example, diversity and multiculturalism) are normally characterized as "liberal."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Samuel Frizell, "Study to Track Intellectual Diversity at College," *Bowdoin Orient*, October 14, 2011, <http://bowdoinorient.com/article/6672>. "Klingenstein's Study," editorial, *Bowdoin Orient*, October 14, 2011, <http://bowdoinorient.com/article/6674>.

<sup>28</sup>Sean McElroy, "Klingenstein's NAS Study Likely to Have Predictable Results," *Bowdoin Orient*, October 28, 2011, <http://bowdoinorient.com/article/6723>.

<sup>29</sup>"Klingenstein's Study."

<sup>30</sup>McElroy, "Klingenstein's NAS Study."

<sup>31</sup>Peter Wood, "NAS Study to Use Unbiased Approach," *Bowdoin Orient*, November 4, 2011, <http://bowdoinorient.com/article/6760>.

But he said the study would focus on the “unexamined assumptions that inform beliefs and behavior,” not on politics per se. Wood explained the research would not be “agenda-driven” or that its conclusions were established in advance.<sup>32</sup>

## Methods and Sources

Getting into the mind of a community that does not welcome such inquiry is not easy. We found some avenues foreclosed. Bowdoin administrators at every level declined to speak with us and only a few faculty members and students were willing. But because Bowdoin needs to present itself to donors, alumni, students, and faculty members, and because laws and regulations require public disclosure of many kinds of institutional facts and materials, we had easy access to many relevant kinds of data.

We did not anticipate when drafting the proposal or in the early stages of our investigation how much light could be shed on Bowdoin in 2011–2012 by examining Bowdoin’s institutional history. Many threads led us back to historical records. By seeing clearly what the college had self-consciously set aside over its long history, we could better see the alternatives for which it had opted. By seeing what Bowdoin chose not to be, we could better understand what it is.

It also became clear to us as the project progressed that Bowdoin possesses a complex historical consciousness. Some of the key themes in its current culture are explicitly appropriated from its past. The term “the common good,” for example, is frequently deployed by the Bowdoin community today to describe aspects of the college’s orientation. It is also part of the name of the Joseph McKeen Center for the Common Good, a campus center that promotes students’ “public engagement.” Bowdoin’s founding president, McKeen used the phrase in his 1802 inaugural address. His original meaning appears to have slight connection to the way “the common good” is used at Bowdoin today, but the historical reference is nonetheless prominent. Understanding Bowdoin in its current form thus requires paying attention to the parts of the college’s past that it has maintained or reappropriated as well as the parts it has overturned.

In his very first convocation address, given on August 29, 2001, President Mills voiced this two-level historical awareness, embracing and distancing himself from Bowdoin’s history.<sup>33</sup> He spoke of the need to attend to Bowdoin’s “first principles” and “origins,” because these, he declared, would provide “the guideposts, the markers,” that would and should govern his administrative choices. Mills also quoted an unnamed Bowdoin history professor: “Bowdoin cannot escape its history, both from a positive and negative perspective.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Barry Mills, “Convocation 2001 Address,” Bowdoin College, Brunswick, ME, August 29, 2001, <http://www.bowdoin.edu/president/speeches/2001/convocation-01.shtml>.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

While we have relied heavily on internal Bowdoin documents, we have also drawn on the numerous books and reports chronicling Bowdoin's history and celebrating its achievements. These include Charles Calhoun's *A Small College in Maine: Two Hundred Years of Bowdoin* (1993), Patricia Anderson's *The Architecture of Bowdoin College* (1988), Robert McCaughey's *Scholars and Teachers: The Faculties of Select Liberal Arts Colleges and Their Place in American Higher Education* (1994), and William Bowen and Sarah Levin's *Reclaiming the Game: College Sports and Educational Values* (2005), to name a few.

We also examined some scholarly works published by members of the Bowdoin faculty. The number of such publications was too large, the difficulty of accessing them too great, and our expertise in the range of relevant subjects too limited to make this a major part of our research program. Though relatively few members of the Bowdoin community were willing to be interviewed, our lead researcher Michael Toscano spent several weeks on campus and succeeded in interviewing six faculty members, about twenty students, and seven alumni. These numbers are too small to represent any statistically significant portion of the community and we have not attempted to use the interview material in that fashion. Rather, these faculty members, students, and alumni challenged, corrected, and guided us as we attempted to sharpen our inquiries. Most were not favorably disposed to our project and stated their reservations forthrightly. Their voices are included in the report without attribution in accordance with their wishes.

The use we made of the Bowdoin website, the *Bowdoin Orient*, the *Bowdoin Daily Sun*, *Bowdoin Magazine*, *Q*, *The F-Word*, student government *Minutes* and packets, and published addresses by President Mills and his predecessors will be plain.

Other sources include: *Forty Years: The History of Women at Bowdoin*, the *Bowdoin Fact Book*, the *President's Report*, the *Minutes* of the Regular Meeting of the Faculty from 1994–1995 to Fall 2011, *Minutes* of the Curriculum and Educational Policy Committee (CEP), Bowdoin's five institutional self-studies, the *Bowdoin College Catalogue* (including the years 1849–1850, 1900–1901, 1910–1911, 1911–1912, 1913–1914, 1928–1929, 1941–1942, 1951–1952, 1953–1954, 1954–1955, 1955–1956, 1956–1957, 1959–1960, 1961–1962, 1964–1965, 1971–1972, 1973–1974, 1981–1982, 1983–1984, 1989–1990, 1993–1994, 1997–1998, 1998–1999, 2007–2008, 2008–2009, 2009–2010, 2011–2012 and 2012–2013), and a number of internal reports, including the *Report of the Working Group on Academic Preparedness*, *Report of the Committee on Governance*, *Curriculum for the First Two Years: A Report for Discussion*, *Report of the Subcommittee on Diversity*, *Report of the Taskforce on Improving the Status of Women at Bowdoin*, *Proposed Revision of the Bowdoin Afro-American Studies Program*, *Proposal for a Minor in Gay and Lesbian Studies at Bowdoin College*, and many others.