

Law School of Harvard University

Cambridge, Mass. 02138

July 17, 1970

Ogden Williams, Esq.
Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Mr. Williams:

Your letter to the Law School Fund Office has been referred to me, in Dean Bok's absence. Quite apart from the question of contributions by alumni to Harvard University, we are naturally distressed to have any alumnus make the broad accusation that "the University has failed to maintain its ideals as being a place where the objective pursuit of truth is paramount." I would ask you to consider how difficult it is to respond to a charge so general and accompanied by no specifications whatsoever.

My response must be equally broad. Were you to be at the Law School on a typical day during term time, I believe that you would find the general pattern of activities quite similar to what we experienced when you and I were students at the School. The major difference is that a very substantial number of students are prepared to raise fundamental questions about our society and its legal system - questions whether its values are right, and questions whether it lives up to its asserted values (and often these are not carefully separated).

The overwhelming percentage of the law students (and I think of the others too, though I know law students best) want to pursue these issues by processes of discussion and debate; they eschew coercion, disruption, and violence, but they will not accept answers based simply on authority or "tradition." A very small group is prepared to go beyond discourse to disruption, when the latter seems to promise some "tactical success," which some of them would define as a desired reform and some tiny number sees as simply continued confusion.

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Against this background, various issues arise, some fairly routine and others charged with emotion. Occasionally, an emotional upheaval occurs, as with the Cambodian venture. Both the Faculty and Administration of the University (and here again I can speak more familiarly of the Law School) stand firmly against coercion, disruption, and violence, but affirm the values and availability of reasoned discourse. Disciplinary action has been uniformly taken against the former, but with care to avoid lumping the student protestors that use ideas with those that use or threaten force. Were you on the scene, you would realize that this is not always easy to accomplish. Perhaps we have not perfectly succeeded, but I would say that we have at least substantially done so.

Is our effort inconsistent with the traditions of the University, the law, or an open society? Are you suggesting that we have not made the effort I described? Or are you saying that, whatever our effort, we have failed? Whatever your answer, could you give me at least one or two specific instances of university (and preferably law school) actions to bear out your point? The essence of what we are trying to get across to our students, both in and out of the classroom, is that broad accusations will not do, that specific problems must be identified and specific solutions found.

We are glad to hear from alumni even when they are critical of what has been done. We take them seriously, as I hope this letter indicates. If you care to write me again, I shall most certainly try to respond.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Albert M. Sacks". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Albert M. Sacks