

**REPORT OF THE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT GOVERNMENT  
ON EATING CLUB DEMOGRAPHIC COLLECTION, TRANSPARENCY, AND  
INCLUSIVITY**

*PREPARED IN RESPONSE TO WINTER 2016 REFERENDUM  
ON EATING CLUB DEMOGRAPHIC COLLECTION*

April 2017

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## Sec. I. Executive Summary

Princeton University's eating clubs boast membership from two-thirds of the Princeton upperclass student body. The eating clubs are private entities, and information regarding demographic information of eating club members is primarily limited to that collected in the University's senior survey and the USG-sponsored voluntary COMBO survey.

The Task Force on the Relationships between the University and the Eating Clubs published a report in 2010 investigating the role of eating clubs on campus, recommending the removal of barriers to inclusion and diversity and the addition of eating club programming for prospective students and University-sponsored alternative social programming.

Demographic collection for exclusive groups is not the norm at Ivy League institutions. Harvard's student newspaper issued an online survey in 2013 to collect information about final club membership, reporting on ethnicity, sexuality, varsity athletic status, and legacy status. Scrutiny of fraternities on peer campuses has been limited to the issue of sexual assault of the Ivy League universities, only Princeton has reported demographic information for Greek life, reporting race and income statistics pulled from a 2007 COMBO survey.

In Winter 2016, Leila Clark '18, responding to concerns of eating club inclusivity and transparency, submitted a referendum to the USG ballot for vote by the student body. The text of the referendum read:

Shall the undergraduates direct the USG Senate to establish a standing committee that works with the Interclub Council to annually collect and release demographic information, such as race, gender, and academic major, about the members of each Eating Club, and additionally, for each selective ('bicker') Club, its applicants ('bickerees')?

The referendum passed with 1,659 votes (68.9%) in favor.

A USG Senate response team was formed in spring 2017 to respond to the referendum, tasked with writing a position paper with recommendations for passage by the USG Senate and presentation to the University administration.

Arguments in favor of demographic collection include increased transparency, disproof of club stereotypes, increased information on eating club membership to inform sophomores of dining options, and the likely resultant push to reaffirm eating clubs as welcoming and inclusive spaces. Arguments against demographic collection include the difficulty of data collection—logistical, low response rate, privacy and legal concerns—and the alternate possibility of a confirmation of eating club stereotypes that discourages prospective members who do not fit the current demographic from bickering. Alternatives to demographic collection include increased diversity programming and efforts to combat the stereotype-heavy eating club conversation perpetuated by campus media publications and the broader student body. Another alternative is the creation of an Senate Ad Hoc Committee, Senate Project, or Senate Task Force to conduct research into eating club accessibility and methods to address it.

In response to the eating club referendum, the Referendum Response Committee members present the following recommendations for approval by the USG:

1. The adoption of a Statement of Principles by the ICC demonstrating a commitment to transparency and inclusivity,
2. The amendment of the USG University Student Life Committee Charter to create a Subcommittee for Eating Club Transparency and Inclusivity before the end of the 2016-2017 academic year,

3. The identification and address of key opportunities between USG and the ICC to increase eating club transparency, inclusivity, and diversity, and
4. The pursuit of demographic information collection for applicants and members of each club and community-building programming in partnership with the eating clubs and Princeton's constituent communities.

## **Sec. II. Background**

### *§ A. Eating Clubs and the University*

The eating clubs were established over a century ago primarily as a result of two developments: the discontinuation of all on-campus food service and the prohibition on fraternities (lifted in the 1980s). Today, the eating clubs are one of several dining options for Princeton upperclassmen, and play a central role in student social life. Approximately two-thirds of juniors and seniors are members of one of the eleven clubs (six—Cannon Dial Elm Club, Cap and Gown Club, University Cottage Club, The Ivy Club, Tiger Inn, Princeton Tower Club—are selective bicker clubs, and five—Princeton Charter Club, Cloister Inn, Colonial Club, Princeton Quadrangle Club, Terrace Club—are open sign-in clubs).

Officially, the eating clubs are private institutions that are independent from the University. The clubs are run by club managers, undergraduate officers, and graduate boards. Leadership representatives from all of the clubs are convened through both the Interclub Council (ICC) and Graduate Interclub Council (GICC), and also cooperate with the University and the USG on a number of issues. For example, they coordinate with the University on shared meal plans, and collaborate with the USG on programming and events such as Lawnparties, Taste of Prospect, and others. Additionally, the University increases financial aid for all upperclassmen due to the higher cost of eating clubs' board rates compared to underclassmen dining options (this increase does not cover social and alcohol fees, or sophomore dues).

Both the University and the USG have collected data on the eating clubs in recent years, such as through the University's senior survey and the USG-sponsored Committee on

Background and Opportunity (COMBO) survey. This data was self-reported, and included data on socioeconomic status. For example, it was found that proportionally fewer low-income and minority students were members of eating clubs.

In 2010, the Task Force on Relationships between the University and the Eating Clubs published a report with recommendations on a range of issues. In the section on “Exclusivity, Inclusiveness and Diversity”, the report’s main recommendations include:

- i. taking steps to remove barriers to inclusion and socioeconomic/ethnic diversity,
- ii. reducing the sense of separation between students in and not in the eating clubs,
- iii. more programming to introduce all underclassmen (especially minorities and internationals) to the eating clubs,
- iv. more University-sponsored social programming with broad appeal, and
- v. increasing interaction between the campus and the eating clubs.

In 2015, a referendum was placed on the ballot calling for the end of bicker, citing inclusivity as a motivation. The referendum did not pass, with 43.6% voting in favor and 56.3% voting against.

### *§ B. Research on Peer Institutions: Final Clubs, Secret Societies, and Greek Life*

Of all the other Ivy League institutions, Harvard University has a structure for its social life that is the most similar to Princeton’s. The majority of their final clubs are single-sex, with two that are newly co-ed and others that are making strides to do the same. Other social groups, those that are not considered final clubs, are also co-ed that were formally single-sex.

The only formal collection of demographic information of the final clubs took place in 2013, when *The Crimson*’s blog, Flyby, sent an online survey to 4,838 students within the sophomore, junior, and senior classes. The survey asked for students’ membership status regarding final clubs, with the listed options being full membership, prior membership, those who have been selected or “punched” to join a club, and those who have never been punched.

Analysis of the survey focused on those respondents who were members of a club compared to those who had never been punched. Within their series on the survey, an article revealed data that reported on respondents' ethnicity, sexuality, varsity athletic status, and legacy status. With regard to ethnicity and sexuality, those who were final club members had the highest self-reported percentages of white and heterosexual students (seventy percent and 95 percent, respectively) of any membership status. Yet notable gaps existed between varsity athletic status and legacy status: 44 percent of club members identify as varsity athletes compared to sixteen percent of those who had never been punched, while 24 percent of club members were legacies while thirteen percent of those who had never been punched were legacies. It is worth noting that Flyby's results could not be compared with the full membership of final clubs since they do not report their membership numbers.

As for other Ivy League schools, there exists many social clubs that students have the chance to join as seniors. There are also secret societies that vary in their level of secrecy and these groups, along with senior societies, are not consistent in terms of single-sex versus co-ed membership. Yet there is no known collection of demographic information for these groups because of their preference for privacy and the small membership these groups have (around 15-30 members).

Fraternities and sororities also offer a parallel to Princeton's eating clubs. However, at peer Ivy League institutions, reporting on campus Greek life demographics is limited. Brown University, Columbia University, and the University of Pennsylvania have not reported demographic information and discussion appears limited to official information on the universities' websites. At Dartmouth College and Harvard, investigations into fraternities and



sororities have occurred following media scrutiny and have focused on Greek life as it relates to alcohol consumption, gender power imbalance, and sexual assault.

In 2016, Yale University issued the report of the Yale College Council Task Force on Greek Life. The Task Force was chartered to investigate the overall climate of the student body toward Greek organizations, evaluate university Greek life policies, and propose recommendations related to the Greek system. Campus surveying did not include demographic collection, instead measuring student opinion of the fraternities and sororities. In the recommendations section, however, the Task Force looked to promote diversity through structured financial aid systems, and through a “concerted effort to support and reach out to cultural centers, cultural fraternity and sorority groups, and other alternative spaces.”

Princeton has set the most relevant precedent for demographic collection, with University President Shirley Tilghman appointing a Working Group on Campus Social and Residential Life in 2010. The Working Group used data from the 2007 COMBO survey to report race and income statistics for campus fraternities and sororities in the Report of the Working Group on Campus Social and Residential Life. The reported data and recommendations in the report served as the impetus for President Tilghman’s ban on freshman affiliation with fraternities and sororities. The COMBO survey is a non-compulsory USG survey to evaluate student opinions on access to resources and opportunities on campus.

### *§ C. The Winter 2016 Referendum*

The call for referendum proposals in alignment with the Winter 2016 Election Cycle was announced in a school-wide email by USG President Aleksandra Czulak ‘17 on October 24,

2016. One proposed question—calling on the eating clubs to collect and release demographic information about their members—made it onto the ballot.

The sponsor of the referendum was Leila Clark '18, a junior from Hong Kong majoring in Computer Science. On November 14, Clark met with the President of the ICC, Christopher Yu '17, to discuss the proposal. Clark had said that if the ICC were to vote to adopt her proposal for demographic collection, she would withdraw the referendum proposal from the ballot. The ICC did not accept the proposal.

On November 14, the Senate voted to accept the wording of Clark's referendum proposal with eighteen votes in favor, one vote against, and one abstention. The final wording of the proposal as agreed to by the sponsor, the Vice President, the Chief Elections Manager, and the USG Senate, and eventually voted upon by the student body, is as follows:

Shall the undergraduates direct the USG Senate to establish a standing committee that works with the Interclub Council to annually collect and release demographic information, such as race, gender and academic major, about the members of each Eating Club, and, additionally for each selective ("bicker") Club, its applicants ("bickerees")?

This differs slightly from the text initially proposed by the sponsor (below):

Should USG work with the eating clubs to collect demographics of the eating clubs and, for the bicker clubs, of students who bicker?

The Chief Elections Manager at the time, Sung Won Chang '18, introduced some modifications to the language, proposing:

Shall all Eating Clubs collect and release demographic information, such as race and gender, about their members and, additionally for selective ("bicker") Clubs, their applicants ("bickerees")?

The sponsor also submitted the following explanation of her motivation for submitting the referendum. This text was included to the Senate during their vote on the referendum, but was not part of the referendum text on the ballot.

When USG collects data on the eating clubs, full surveys happen only occasionally (e.g. the last report on eating club demographics came out in 2010) and when the eating clubs are a 'hot topic' of debate for the year. But the eating clubs are a huge part of the Princeton experience for students, every single year, and in order to begin to understand the impact they have on us we must first start by learning about the demographics of the clubs. Annual data collected by a devoted standing committee of the USG would be hugely valuable not only to the student body at large, but also to students in the eating clubs who want to understand the impact that their decisions have on which students join - and stay in - their clubs.

A further explanation on the motivation of the referendum was provided in an email to the Chief

Elections Manager, reprinted below:

From: **Leila Clark** <[lvclark@princeton.edu](mailto:lvclark@princeton.edu)>  
Date: Sun, Nov 13, 2016 at 12:48 AM  
Subject: Re: [USG F16 Referenda] Question on Intent  
To: Sung Won Chang <[swchang@princeton.edu](mailto:swchang@princeton.edu)>

Dear Sung Won,

So I'm meeting the acting president of ICC tomorrow to discuss the referendum proposal. If that meeting goes well, he'll bring the proposal to the ICC. I should know the result of the ICC's discussion on Monday. If the ICC votes favorably on my proposal, I will withdraw the referendum as it will no longer be needed.

If they do not, however, I'd like to keep the referendum on the ballot. I think that the eating clubs, for better and for worse, form an integral part of Princeton's social life and define "the Princeton experience" for many students - both those who are in the clubs, and those who aren't. As Princeton students, we owe it to ourselves and to our fellow students to know more about the eating clubs, and I believe that demographic information is the best and simplest way to start.

I have qualms about the results that a self-reported survey would give us. Self-reported surveys are notoriously inaccurate and depend heavily on who chooses to reply - and, to be quite honest, I don't think many upperclassmen in the clubs would bother to fill in a survey circulated by USG. The ICC, by contrast, collects information on every student who bickers or signs into a club. We could easily get very accurate demographic data by adding an optional demographic information section during the sign-in/bicker season.

I have heard that the administration claims that they have no power over the eating clubs. But I think that, if this referendum proposal passes, it will serve as very good evidence of how much we as a student body care about this issue. This, I think, would help convince the ICC (and possibly the administration) to support the proposal if they are ambivalent or unsure about taking action on it. Even if it doesn't, I hope that this referendum will help catalyze discussion amongst the student body on this very important question.

I hope that's enough to make clear why I think this question ought to go on the ballot. If not, please let me know, and I'll be happy to elaborate.

Yours,  
Leila

On Wednesday, November 23, 2016, Czulak sent an email to the entire student body with a reminder of the opportunity to create an official opposition party to the referendum that would be placed on the ballot. The deadline for registering as the opposition was 5:00 p.m. on Sunday, November 27. No students or student organizations expressed interest in serving as an official opponent to the referendum.

Campaigning began on Monday, November 28. Among the campaign measures that Clark undertook was the publication of an opinion piece in *The Daily Princetonian*, titled “It's time to demystify Princeton's eating clubs” and published by the paper in its December 5, 2016 issue. Clark also participated in an Open House forum hosted by Whig-Clio in Whig Hall on December 4, 2016, and invited student group leaders to publish an official endorsement of the referendum. There was an additional column in *The Daily Princetonian* published on December 4 by columnist Max Grear '18 urging students to “Vote yes for eating club demographics.” The newspaper's editorial board issued its endorsement against the referendum on December 5.

The student body voted on the referendum, in tandem with its regular Winter elections, from noon on Monday, December 5 until noon on Wednesday, December 7, 2016. According to the results announced on Friday, December 9, the referendum passed by a margin of nearly forty points. A detailed vote breakdown, as provided by Chief Elections Manager Chang and emailed to the student body by President Czulak is reproduced below:

## REFERENDUM SPONSORED BY LEILA CLARK '18

Turnout: 2,408 / 5,251 (45.9%)

<b>Yes</b>	<b>1,659 (68.9%)</b>	<b>**PASSED**</b>
No	749 (31.1%)	

*Class of 2017: Yes 346, No 204*

*Class of 2018: Yes 395, No 232*

*Class of 2019: Yes 479, No 152*

*Class of 2020: Yes 439, No 161*

According to Article X, §1003 (a) of the Constitution of the Senate of the Undergraduate Student Government of Princeton University, the vote on this referendum is binding on the USG Senate because (1) at least 1/3 of the undergraduates voted in the referendum and (2) a majority of votes cast in the referendum were in the affirmative. Section 8 of the USG Referenda Handbook establishes “USG Senate Action if Referendum Passes,” which reads as follows:

If a referendum measure pertaining to the opinion of the undergraduates on a particular issue passes, the USG Senate will write a formal position paper that will detail the student position and action steps for the USG and/or relevant parties to take to address the issue. The USG President shall forward the position paper to the University administration and request a formal response by the administration.

At the February 19, 2017 USG Senate Meeting, Vice President Daniel Qian '19 presented the Spring semester project teams, including a Referendum Response Team tasked with implementing USG's response to the referendum in accordance with Section 8 of the Referenda Handbook. The team is headed by U-Councilor Olivia Grah '19 and also consists of Senator Andrew Ma '19, Senator Eli Schechner '18, and Public Relations Chair Maya Wesby '18.

The absence of a referendum resolution submitted by the sponsor in accordance with the ballot question has complicated the referendum response team's task. Nevertheless, this report should be understood to serve as the formal position paper as outlined by USG Referenda Handbook Section 8.

### **Sec. III. Arguments**

#### *§ A. In Favor of the Referendum*

Proponents argue that collecting a range of demographic information on eating clubs would increase transparency on general membership and dispel the mystique of Prospect Avenue's eating clubs. The collected data, once presented, could help remove the elitist and exclusive connotations of eating clubs and instead provide evidence that the clubs are filled with diverse groups of students who differ in race, gender, financial aid status, and more.

The arguments on the benefit of collecting demographic data focus on three themes. First, there is the benefit that the data will have on the clubs. If the data for a club, for example, ends up reaffirming stereotypes, this evidence will (or, should) motivate club officers to reaffirm eating clubs as welcoming and inclusive social spaces. Moving forward, it then becomes the responsibility of club officers to reform recruitment strategies and do away with unfair practices that may cater to the same types of students. In addition, the collected information on demographics would be integrated into the ICC website, and students may find that the data combats misinformation about eating clubs and proves some stereotypes to be untrue. Eating clubs may be more or less representative of the student body than we think, but the actual level of diversity cannot be proven without a collection of demographic data.

Secondly, collecting and revealing this data helps to inform sophomores and juniors considering joining an eating club about their potential dining options for the remainder of their time at Princeton. Information on eating clubs should not be found only through the nightlife they provide; curious potential members should also know about the clubs as eating options,

study spaces, and as a means of meeting and befriending a variety of students. Providing this data would then inform sophomores of all the clubs and their respective memberships, rather than just bickering or signing into one based on stereotypes or late-night experiences. Furthermore, the results of the referendum show that, while all class years voted in the affirmative, the first-year and sophomore classes were even stronger in their support for the referendum than the junior and senior classes. This speaks to the importance of collecting demographic data, as it would inform the choices of where the University's newer students will want to go, or whether they choose to join an eating club at all.

Lastly, a collection of this data would speak volumes about not only the eating clubs but also the University. If information is found to reaffirm the stereotypes of one or several clubs, it is a sign of division that must be addressed as a student body, not solely by a particular club. In other words, the presence of one particular demographic in an eating club should not reflect poorly on a single club but should rather reflect University-wide divisions. A liberal arts experience, particularly one that champions a service to humanity, should not foster pockets of segregation within eating clubs, which are designed to be social spaces for all types of students to interact and collaborate. A collection of demographic data would help to identify where we are lacking in integrating different facets of the student body.

### *§ B. In Opposition to the Referendum*

First, opponents argue that the data collection process itself would be practically difficult. It would be hard to verify the accuracy of the data collected and maintain anonymity. It would also

be difficult to mandate data collection, as the eating clubs are privately-run institutions over which the University and USG lack jurisdiction. Additionally, for a self-reported survey, the results may be skewed due to a small sample size, self-selection bias, and different response rates from different types of students. It is also unclear who would manage and view the sensitive data that is collected.

Second, data collection may not add positive value for prospective members seeking to make their decisions on whether to bicker or join a club. Students already have many other opportunities to learn about the clubs, such as through the many sophomore events that are held during the fall semester. Moreover, the released demographic information may actually have unintended consequences on the decision-making process, as it could discourage students who do not match a given club's demographic statistics from joining. This could backfire and further decrease a club's diversity.

Third, demographic data collection could make members and applicants feel uncomfortable. Students may be uncomfortable sharing their own demographic information, such as their gender identity, which may be private. Requesting demographic information as part of the bicker process could also make applicants feel reduced to those aspects of their identities during an already challenging bicker process. Because of the potential incentive not to share demographic information, there is the possibility of low survey response rates that would result in survey results that are not representative of actual eating club populations. When considering the publication of the demographic information, the voluntary nature of demographic collection and reporting could introduce a game theory-type scenario where eating clubs would only report



information if all other eating clubs pledged to do the same. Because there is no formal guarantee of reporting, the default action for all clubs would be to not report demographic information.

Finally, there are privacy and legal concerns about reporting the demographics of eating club members and applicants. This would be especially problematic if the data size was not large enough to guarantee true anonymity of individual responses.

### *§ C. Proposed Alternatives to the Referendum*

Statements of referendum supporters in campus media described the referendum as an attempt to improve eating club transparency, diversity, and inclusivity. Demographic collection poses significant difficulties, and it forces the consideration of other alternatives that would work to promote the above pillars.

Eating clubs could, with aid from the ICC, USG, or other campus entities, work to increase programming to support eating club transparency and inclusiveness. Open houses, panels, dinner conversations, and other programs that work to physically open eating club doors during normal eating club operation hours and introduce underclassmen to eating clubs. Interactions with the eating club house and its members would offer opportunities for underclassmen to get to know eating clubs as defined not by stereotypes or nights out, but rather as defined by approachability and accessibility.

Eating club stereotypes are promoted through campus conversation that begins before the start of the first year of college. Campus media publication *The Daily Princetonian* has written articles such as “The Street’s Take on the Street” and the annual “The Freshman Dictionary:

Revised and Updated” that paint the landscape of Princeton’s campus and culture, introducing stereotypes to help orient first years. For example, Ivy Club is introduced in “The Freshman Dictionary” as “Bicker club with reputation for elitism (even by Princeton standards) and mahogany,” and Cottage Club is defined as “Bicker club known to be populated by athletes, Southerners, and wealthy Americans.” This promotion of stereotypes is problematic because it creates distinctions that act to heighten feelings of exclusivity. Working with campus media publications to change eating club conversation would promote the goals of transparency, diversity, and inclusivity. Eating Clubs would not be introduced by stereotype, and this inclusivity of language would start with Princeton admission.

An oversight or executive body, in the form of an Senate Ad Hoc Committee, Senate Project, or Senate Task Force could conduct more in-depth research into eating club accessibility and methods to address it. Key questions of the Project could include the current state of eating club accessibility, how to improve eating club accessibility, and the best forms of programming to combat exclusivity, with the Project also operating as the executor of a series of pilot programs.

#### **Sec. IV. Recommendations**

1. We recommend that the Interclub Council (ICC) adopt a Statement of Principles demonstrating a commitment towards the goals of transparency and inclusivity.
2. We recommend that under Article III, §308(c) of the Constitution of the Senate of the Undergraduate Student Government of Princeton University, the Senate amend the Charter of the University Student Life Committee (USLC) in order to convene a permanent USG USLC Subcommittee for Eating Club Transparency and Inclusivity. This subcommittee should consist of members of the ICC, the USG Senate, and the Sophomore, Junior, and Senior Class Governments. Members-at-large should be invited to join by the Chair of the Subcommittee as necessary, while maintaining a minimum 10% representation by students not affiliated with any eating club.
3. The Subcommittee should be tasked with identifying and addressing key opportunities for collaboration between the USG and the ICC in order to increase eating club transparency, inclusivity, and diversity.
4. The Subcommittee should pursue the collection of demographic information for each eating club, considering members and applicants, and programming in partnership with the eating clubs and constituent communities on campus to further promote these goals.
5. The Charter amendments should be prepared and voted on by the Senate before the end of the 2016-17 academic year such that the subcommittee membership may be chosen in advance of an inaugural meeting in September 2017.

## **Sec. V. Acknowledgments**

The Referendum Response Committee team members thank the members of the Interclub Council, referendum author Leila Clark '18, Aleksandra Czulak '17, and others for their help in the research and writing of this report.