

Student Demands at Sarah Lawrence Will Have Negative Impact

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To the Editor:

The students of the Diaspora Coalition at Sarah Lawrence College no doubt have good intentions, and they are right to draw attention to the plight of low-income students, which is indeed a serious problem ([“Yes, Students at Sarah Lawrence Are Demanding Free Detergent. But There’s More to It Than You Might Think,”](#) *The Chronicle*, March 15). And I applaud their condemnation of funding from the Charles Koch Foundation, which has done so much to undercut academic independence across the country, including it would appear at Sarah Lawrence. However if one reads the student demands in full, it is clear that their activism will have a negative impact.

First, their demands contain an overtone of bullying, which is especially marked in their treatment of Professor Samuel Abrams, whose academic freedom is clearly being undermined. Note that I do not like Professor Abrams’ conservative views, nor do I like his affiliation with the Koch-funded Institute for Humane Studies. But that is no excuse for the students’ efforts to intimidate Abrams into retracting his public statements.

Second, there is a strong tone of elitism and entitlement that emanates from the students’ demands, which constitutes a more generalized problem for the activist left. This tone of entitlement suffuses the whole document, and it goes well beyond the specific issue of laundry detergent cited by *The Chronicle*.

Third, the demands are clearly counter-productive, since they advocate the hiring of new academic administrators — which would draw money away from scholarships and financial aid for low-income students. If implemented, these demands would produce an even less diverse student body at Sarah Lawrence.

I fear that the main effect of the Diaspora Coalition’s missteps will be to alienate the public from left activism in general, while generating support for demagogues like Donald Trump.

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