Dear Members of the Class of 2015,

As you prepare to join the Bowdoin community, I write to you about an issue that is common on college campuses: student use and abuse of alcohol. Before you arrive on campus and once you are here, please take some time to discuss the issues referenced in this letter with your friends, teammates, floormates, coaches, staff, and parents, as this issue affects us all. If you choose to drink, your decisions regarding alcohol warrant thoughtful consideration.

Policy and Protocols
Your health and safety are the College's highest priority, and these values drive our policy and practices. Our policies are intended not only to prevent underage drinking in compliance with state law, but also to allow us to limit the amount of alcohol being served on campus, to enable the Office of Safety and Security to monitor events, and to ensure that event hosts understand the risks they assume and the support available to them to organize and conduct safer parties. Hard alcohol is prohibited on campus due to its high correlation with life-threatening drinking situations. While some students have proposed that we lift the ban on hard alcohol to discourage underground drinking and the rapid ingestion of alcohol through "pre-gaming," evidence from many of our peer schools clearly demonstrates that allowing hard alcohol at registered campus events would lead to a further increase in life-threatening situations. Similarly, drinking games, which encourage the rapid ingestion of alcohol, are also prohibited.

As students at a private institution, you don't enjoy any special exemptions from Maine law. Also, please remember, according to Bowdoin's Academic Honor Code and Social Code, you are responsible for your behavior on campus and off campus, whether sober or drunk. The use of alcohol in no way constitutes an excuse for behavior that violates College policies or Maine law or otherwise infringes upon the rights of others. On campus, you are more likely to deal with the Office of Safety and Security. Off campus, it will likely be the police. If you choose to drink, please take some time to familiarize yourself with the Bowdoin alcohol and drug policy, which contains important information about Maine law.

Some Relevant Data
Most Bowdoin students use common sense and make responsible choices if they choose to drink. Surveys tell us that almost three-quarters of students have consumed alcohol before even coming to Bowdoin and 86% drink while here. Two-thirds of those who choose to drink, however, do so infrequently or in moderation while one-third do so heavily (defined as five or more alcoholic drinks in one sitting at least once or twice a week). Interestingly, 91% of students expressed a preference for being around students who drink moderately or not at all. Please know that if you choose to drink excessive amounts of alcohol while at Bowdoin, it will be one of the riskiest and most dangerous things you will do.

Troubling incidents—like arrests for operating under the influence (OUIs) and hard alcohol poisonings—occur every year. On average over the past five years, 21 students per year have been transported to the hospital for alcohol poisoning; male and female students have been equally represented, as have all class years. More than 85% of these students were "experienced" drinkers prior to their transport. Poor decisions by individuals and the irresponsible use of hard alcohol, especially in the form of "pre-gaming" and "ripping shots," were the common denominators. In my 15 years at the College, only a handful of students have been taken to the hospital because they had too much beer or wine to drink.
I am asking you to exercise good judgment in your own decisions and to look out for one another. Given the caliber of student Bowdoin chooses to admit, I know you are fully capable of eliminating stupid and reckless behavior, the consequences of which could affect you long after your time at Bowdoin. Simply put, even one transport for alcohol poisoning is too many, and I look forward to the semester when these numbers are zero, thus minimizing the risk of an alcohol-related death.

**Enforcement**
When policy violations are brought to the College's attention, we will respond and take action, and we will expect you to take responsibility for your choices. When it comes to disciplinary sanctions, we review each incident individually and strive to be fair and consistent, with an emphasis on education.

Alcohol violations involving violence, sexual assault, vandalism, OUI, excessive consumption, hard alcohol, and/or unregistered parties are taken especially seriously. Why? Because, again, our primary focus is on the health and safety of the individual and the community. We want to do everything we can, both proactively and reactively, to discourage unhealthy and dangerous behavior. With this goal in mind, we will, when appropriate, notify parents and coaches. Any incident involving violence, however, is referred to the Judicial Board and could result in suspension or dismissal.

Almost every case of student social misconduct on our campus involves alcohol or drugs. When thinking is impaired, good people make poor decisions. Unfortunately, even a momentary lapse in judgment can adversely affect your safety, your reputation within our small community, your current student standing, and even your graduate school and employment prospects. So, before you choose to drink, I urge you to familiarize yourself with Maine law and our policies, think about what you are doing, and know your limits.

Your actions may also have consequences beyond the campus. Local police will cite or arrest you if you are acting irresponsibly in public or creating danger for yourself or others. If you are honest and cooperative in your interactions with police officers, they will be more likely to use discretion. Brunswick Police won't go into campus buildings unless there is cause (e.g., someone is fleeing and goes into a residence hall; the police are summoned to a specific location; they are accompanying Brunswick Rescue when responding to a medical emergency; etc.). Information about arrests, citations, and convictions is published in the local newspaper, regardless of whether or not you are a Bowdoin student, and with the advent of Internet search engines and Google alerts, that information is widely available for an unlimited period of time. Over the last few years, I have received several calls from parents asking that I contact a newspaper or Google to have a student's name removed. This isn't an effective or practical approach, nor is it the College's responsibility.

**Concern for Others**
At Bowdoin, students look out for one another, and this is a defining aspect of our community. If you are ever concerned about the health and safety of an individual, no matter the circumstances, please err on the side of caution and call the Office of Safety and Security for help. Waiting means taking a chance with someone else's life.

Similarly, if you are concerned about a friend's drinking behavior or patterns, step in and take action. Others may share your concern but are unwilling to do anything about it. Although it's easy to avoid what can be a difficult conversation or hope someone else will intervene, this is inconsistent with concern for others—one of the key values of our learning community.

Supporting others when they need assistance—no matter how difficult or awkward the interaction may be—
is essential in a community such as ours. Remember, there are people in the Office of the Dean of Student Affairs, Counseling Services, Health Services, and Residential Life who can help you and/or your friends prepare for a conversation or direct you to appropriate campus or community resources. I have sat with too many students who have hit bottom as the result of an alcohol problem—students who have told me they wished a friend had intervened. You may encounter initial anger or denial when having such a conversation, but those with the strongest relationships who can point to specific behaviors have the best chance of getting through to someone. You will be a better friend for having done so.

As a student, your individual actions and behavior shape the student culture, so act in ways that are consistent with the community you want to be part of. Figure out how you, personally, are going to make your own choices and determine what you are going to do if a friend or fellow Bowdoin student is making a dangerous choice or acting irresponsibly.

I hope you will enjoy your inaugural year at Bowdoin and do so with a commitment to your own well-being and that of your fellow students.

Wishing you a healthy and safe academic year!

Tim Foster
Dean of Student Affairs