

From: **President** <president@bard.edu>

Date: Tue, Feb 10, 2026 at 8:41 AM

Subject: [undergrad] Message from Leon Botstein

To: Faculty and Staff announcements list

<college@bard.edu>, undergrad

<undergrad@bard.edu>, Graduate Programs

- all students <gradprograms@bard.edu>

To: The Bard Community

From: Leon Botstein, President

Let me take this opportunity to make absolutely clear to the Bard community the connection between Jeffrey Epstein and the College. My interactions with Epstein were always and only for the sole purpose of soliciting donations for the College. Mr. Epstein was not my friend; he was a prospective donor.

In light of the renewed attention that is properly being paid to Epstein and his association with key institutions and figures in our country and around the world, it is important to explain transparently the chronology and facts of the connection to the College.

The contact between Bard College and Mr. Epstein began with an unsolicited gift of \$75,000 from him to Bard High School Early College (BHSEC) in 2011 that he gave at the request of a BHSEC parent. Because of that gift, I, in fulfillment of my responsibilities as the chief fundraiser for the College, pursued the possibility of further philanthropic contributions. Mr. Epstein gave a second gift in 2012 to Bard High School Early College, including the donation of computers.

Mr. Epstein represented himself as a billionaire philanthropist who was generous to charities, with a particular interest in the arts and music, programs typically starved for financial resources. I pursued this development prospect over a span of approximately six years, at a time of economic stress following the financial crisis, in a manner consistent with my practice of sustained communication with donors and potential donors to the College.

That engagement included periodic meetings, the exchange of written communications, and responsive gestures, all within the boundaries of common fundraising practice. As a prospective major donor Mr. Epstein visited Bard briefly a few times for development meetings, and concerts at the Fisher Center for the Performing Arts. He did not visit any Bard High School Early College campus.

Mr. Epstein repeatedly dangled the promise of a multi-million-dollar contribution to Bard College. However, a major gift never materialized. Instead, as we disclosed to the *New York Times* in 2023, Mr. Epstein gave a final contribution, a consulting fee from his foundation in the amount of \$150,000, which I promptly donated to Bard.

Mr. Epstein was a skilled manipulator, prodigious networker, and serial exaggerator, and it appears he used the association with Bard and other institutions to burnish his image, although he never displayed generosity to the College commensurate with his claims of wealth.

When it became apparent that Mr. Epstein was not going to become a major donor, our contact became more sporadic, but I always retained the warm tone of communication I use with donors and prospects. I was not following the revelatory closing chapter of Mr. Epstein's life and the extent of his crimes until he was arrested in 2019. I remain shocked and appalled at the horrific nature and extent of his monstrous and criminal depravity. I am deeply sorry to have involved myself and the College with him in any way.

All the interactions I had with Mr. Epstein were solely focused on the effort to secure funds for the programs of Bard College. I would like to clarify a few items that have appeared in the press.

Mr. Epstein suggested the Black Family as a fundraising prospect in 2012. In December, I flew with Mr. and Mrs. Black to the Virgin Islands on their private plane and had a fundraising dinner with their family on their boat; Mr. Epstein was present for dinner. I became ill, stayed by myself, and took a commercial flight home. I thanked Mr. Epstein for facilitating the engagement with the Blacks. This fundraising trip resulted in a \$250,000 gift from Leon Black in support of the arts at Bard approximately 18 months later.

An email in which I cited Vladimir Nabokov has also been reported. Mr. Epstein had asked me about Nabokov; I published an essay in 2013 on Nabokov and Stravinsky.

Finally, [as reported in the *Financial Times*](#), I have long been a collector of antique time pieces, a personal interest originating with my family's history. Over the years, I have advised dozens of individuals, including donors, interested in purchasing such pieces. Mr. Epstein sought my counsel to purchase a watch for himself. I arranged for him to obtain an antique watch. He then changed his mind, and I decided to buy the watch with my own funds.

Fundraising demands myriad scheduling emails, conversation, frequent travel, meetings, and long-term cultivation. That is the process illustrated in the correspondence and meetings with Epstein.

Once again, I want to express my regret at this connection and my deepest sympathies for Epstein's victims.

Sincerely,
Leon Botstein