



*Institutions in Crisis*

# CRISIS OF PURPOSE IN THE IVY LEAGUE

The Harvard Presidency of Lawrence Summers  
and the Context of American Higher Education

**Rebecca Dunning and Anne Sarah Meyers**

In 2001, Lawrence Summers became the 27th president of Harvard University. Five tumultuous years later, he would resign. The popular narrative of Summers' troubled tenure suggests that a series of verbal indiscretions created a loss of confidence in his leadership, first among faculty, then students, alumni, and finally Harvard's trustee bodies. From his contentious meeting with the faculty of the African and African American Studies Department shortly after he took office in the summer of 2001, to his widely publicized remarks on the possibility of innate gender differences in mathematical and scientific aptitude, Summers' reign was marked by a series of verbal gaffes regularly reported in *The Harvard Crimson*, *The Boston Globe*, and *The New York Times*.

The resignation of Lawrence Summers and the sense of crisis at Harvard may have been less about individual personality traits, however, and more about the context in which Summers served. Contestation in the areas of university governance, accountability, and institutional purpose conditioned the context within which Summers' presidency occurred, influencing his appointment as Harvard's 27th president, his tumultuous tenure, and his eventual departure.

*This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution - Noncommercial - No Derivative Works 3.0 Unported License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>. You may reproduce this work for non-commercial use if you use the entire document and attribute the source: The Kenan Institute for Ethics at Duke University.*

## Introduction

On Thursday, October 11, 2001, the Harvard campus was preparing for the inauguration of its twenty-seventh president, Lawrence Summers. Organizers made phone calls to follow-up reserved ticketed admissions. University Marshal Richard Hunt ensured that revered relics of the past – the Mount Holyoke chair and symbolic signs of the President’s office – were successfully transported from the Fogg Art Museum to the campus’ outdoor stage. Esteemed faculty and board members rehearsed the opening processional in traditional garb.

Delivering an address at the inauguration ceremony, Richard Levin, President of Yale University, called on Summers to “uphold Harvard’s ancient commitment to free inquiry, free expression, and reasoned debate.” Members of Harvard’s board, faculty, administration, alumni, and student body were anticipating how Lawrence Summers would propel the venerated institution into the twenty-first century. None of these groups could have predicted the maelstrom created by Summers’ brief tenure and his controversial departure just five years later. Summers’ resignation would become an infamous event underscoring institutional contestation over questions of appropriate governance, accountability, and purpose in higher education within an increasingly competitive, complex, and corporatized context.

## Background and Context

From the founding of America’s first college – Harvard University in 1636 – institutions of higher education have grown substantially in size and scope. Over the past century college enrollment and the diversity of institutions of higher education increased most dramatically – from 600,000 students enrolled in less than 100 regionally-based institutions in 1920 to 18.5 million in over 4,000 two- and four-year colleges and universities in 2008. Much of this growth stems directly from the influx of government funds into higher education during and after WWII. These funds came in the form of research subsidies and tuition grants and loans.

### Resources for Higher Education in the WWII and Post-WWII Years

The U.S. government’s decision to fund war-time research within existing public and private universities, rather than building government-run research labs, led directly to the creation of the modern American research university.<sup>1</sup> By 1947, government spending for research within higher education was three times what the combined income of all institutions of higher education had been in 1941.<sup>2</sup> Spending continued to rise in the post-war years, with federal support for basic scientific research rising 25-fold between 1948 and 1968, to nearly \$3 billion annually.<sup>3</sup> Universities bid on research grants in a fashion similar to that of construction companies bidding on government contracts. The result was the creation of a market for university research, and concomitant competition among universities for government funds.

In the post-war years industry served as an alternate source of research funding. Prior to the 1970s, industry research and university research had operated on parallel and non-intersecting tracks. As the pace of government research funding slowed in the 1970s and 1980s, industry became an attractive funding source. Tax breaks for industry-university collaborations encouraged greater industry involvement. Passage of the 1980 Bayh-Dole Act, which permitted universities to patent discoveries made using federal funding, further encouraged the blending of the

<sup>1</sup> Smith, Wilson and Thomas Bender, Eds. “Introduction.” *American Higher Education Transformed, 1940-2005, Documenting the National Discourse*. Baltimore: Johns-Hopkins University Press.

<sup>2</sup> Bonner, Thomas. 1986. “The Unintended Revolution in America’s Colleges Since 1940.” *Change*, September/October, pgs. 44-51.

<sup>3</sup> Bok, Derek. 2003. *Universities in the Marketplace: The Commercialization of Higher Education*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

research goal of universities with the commercial goals of industry. Between 1974 and 2000, the annual number of patents generated from the top 100 research universities increased from 177 to 3,200.<sup>4</sup> The fastest growth in industry-funded research over the past two decades has been in biotechnology and clinical research associated with the development of new pharmaceuticals.<sup>5</sup>

While industry funding comprises only a relatively small amount of total R&D in higher education – an estimated 8-10% in 2000<sup>6</sup> – a few institutions rely on industry support to a substantial degree. Duke University leads with 31% of its R&D budget funded by industry, and MIT had 20% funded by industry in 2000.<sup>7</sup> Harvard, in comparison, had just 3.6% of R&D covered by industry. This is partly attributable to the fact that Harvard has some of the toughest conflict of interest guidelines restricting the financial interest that university faculty or staff may hold in a company with which they are also conducting research.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to growth in research monies and increases in faculty and administrative staff, the number of students increased dramatically as federal loans and grants subsidized student tuition in the post-war years. First through the GI-Bill and later via Pell Grants and federally-subsidized student loans, the tuition resources available to students, and thus available to colleges and universities, grew exponentially. Student enrollment grew eight-fold between 1940 and 1980.<sup>9</sup> Colleges and universities, which once served primarily local and regional constituencies, began to draw students both nationally and internationally, with student-consumers choosing from among an array of higher education options – public and land-grant universities, small private colleges, community colleges, and distance learning. Universities and colleges competed for students' tuition and, simultaneously, for future alumni contributors. Alumni donations became a more important source of funds as universities grew more adept at capturing this source of revenue.

### **Structural Characteristics and Change in Higher Education**

Higher education is one of the oldest social institutions. The original purpose of the university was to conserve and transmit the learning and skills of the church. The Morrill Act of 1862 established land-grant universities, making agricultural research and public service part of the assumed responsibilities of higher education. As the size of universities grew, the small regional college focused primarily on scholarly activities and teaching grew into a multifaceted organization with multiple activities, including faculty engaged in research, collaboration with government and industry, public advocacy, and the teaching and training of graduates and undergraduates. The president of the university, once drawn from the faculty and regarded primarily as an intellectual mentor, assumed an increasing variety of administrative tasks. As these tasks multiplied with the growth of enrollments and new research initiatives, presidents hired administrative personnel to occupy new roles and positions in offices of admission, university life, alumni affairs, building construction and maintenance, technology transfer, and the like.

In the early post-war years faculty and administration achieved a compromise position on governance, termed the “shared governance” model. Shared governance assumes that faculty, administration, and trustees all contribute

---

<sup>4</sup> Krinsky, Sheldon. 2003. *Science in the Private Interest: Has the Lure of Profits Corrupted Biomedical Research?* Lanham, MA: Rowan & Littlefield. Page 81.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Bok, Derek. 2003. *Universities in the Marketplace: The Commercialization of Higher Education*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Page 60. ; Krinsky, Sheldon. 2003. *Science in the Private Interest: Has the Lure of Profits Corrupted Biomedical Research?* Lanham, MA: Rowan & Littlefield. Page 79.

<sup>7</sup> Krinsky, Sheldon. 2003. *Science in the Private Interest: Has the Lure of Profits Corrupted Biomedical Research?* Lanham, MA: Rowan & Littlefield. Page 80.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Bonner, Thomas. 1986. “The Unintended Revolution in America’s Colleges Since 1940.” *Change*, September/October, pgs. 44-51.

to decision-making. This community model contrasts to the hierarchical arrangements characteristic of the managerial or corporate model of governance.<sup>10</sup> As the size of the administration grew over time, the efficacy of shared governance came into question. A larger administration could free faculty from tedious administrative tasks, freeing them to concentrate on research. Because tenure was (and continues to be) based primarily on peer-reviewed research publications, faculty often willingly submitted decision-making to the new cadres of administrators. As a result, over time professors became more accountable to their disciplines and the standards of professional groups, and less to the particular universities. Administrators, in comparison, understood their commitments to be largely financial, and in decision-making referenced the numerous stakeholders to which their actions were accountable – students and parents; government, industry, and foundations; alumni contributors; and boards of trustees.

With the split in sources of accountability – disciplinary communities for faculty, resource providers for the president, administration, and trustees – the shared governance model came under growing pressure. As one critic and former university president stated, “The challenges and pace of change faced by the modern university no longer allow the luxury of ‘consensus’ leadership, at least to the degree that ‘building consensus’ means seeking the approval of all concerned comments.”<sup>11</sup> While presidents and administrators sought a more top-down, ‘nimble’ corporate model of governance, faculty and others argued that the efficiencies gained from a corporate model would erode the efficacy of higher education to sustain its traditional role in society, a role for which faculty cast themselves as gate-keepers.<sup>12</sup> This traditional role casts higher education as a public institution and thus public good, charged with educating citizens for democratic engagement and leadership, advancing knowledge through research, preserving knowledge and making it available to the community, developing the arts and humanities, and broadening access to education to ensure a diverse democracy.<sup>13</sup>

The appropriate balance of power within the model of shared governance, and how this balance has changed in recent decades, is a topic of frequent debate.<sup>14</sup> A 2001 survey found that faculty have as much power over their traditional roles in the area of curriculum, degree requirements, and appointments and promotions, as they did in the

---

<sup>10</sup> *The Chronicle of Higher Education* provides a history of shared governance and a discussion board at the following site, accessed June 2, 2009: <http://chronicle.com/colloquy/98/sharedgov/background.htm>. From the site’s background information: “Shared governance is an idea developed by higher-education groups and disseminated by the American Association of University Professors in its 1966 “Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities.” The proposal lays out the roles that trustees, administrators, professors, and even students should play in their “shared responsibility and cooperative action” for running institutions. The statement says, for example, that professors should have primary authority over curriculum, research, and faculty status, and that their decisions should be overruled by the president or governing board “only in exceptional circumstance.” At the time, higher-education groups, including the governing-boards association [The Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges], “recognized” and “commended” the statement as a step forward in delineating governance roles, but did not “endorse” it – “a fact that the A.A.U.P. sometimes forgets,” says Tom Ingram, president of the governing-boards group. In 1999, the governing-boards association put out a report that called for strengthening the power of the presidency. Now the group wants to develop a new statement, specifying “what role the faculty should and should not presume to have” in running institutions. (Comments by Tom Ingram on *The Chronicle of Education’s* discussion board, cited above.)

<sup>11</sup> Duderstadt, James J. 2001. “Fire, Ready, Aim: University Decision-Making during an Era of Rapid Change.” In *Governance in Higher Education: The University in a State of Flux*. Werner Hirsch and Luc Weber, Eds. Pages 26-51. London: Economica Ltd. Page 47.

<sup>12</sup> Birnbaum, Robert. 2004. “The End of Shared Governance: Looking Ahead or Looking Back.” *New Directions for Higher Education* 127: 5-22.

<sup>13</sup> Kezar, Adrianna. 2004. “Obtaining Integrity? Reviewing and Examining the Charter between Higher Education and Society.” *The Review of Higher Education* 27(4): 429-459.

<sup>14</sup> For differing opinions on the changing balance of power between administration and faculty in higher education see: Giroux, Henry A. and Kostas Myrsiades, Eds. 2005. *Beyond the Corporate University: Culture and Pedagogy in the New Millennium*. Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield.; Hirsch, Werner Z. and Luc Weber, Eds. *Governance in Higher Education: The University in a State of Flux*. London: Economica Ltd.; Smith, Wilson and Thomas Bender, Eds. “Introduction.” *American Higher Education Transformed, 1940-2005, Documenting the National Discourse*. Baltimore: Johns-Hopkins University Press.; Gumpert, Patricia. 2007. “Sociology of Higher Education: An Evolving Field.” In *Sociology of Higher Education and Contributions to Their Contexts*, Patricia Gumpert, Ed. Pages 17-50 Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University; Kezar, Adrianna. 2004. “Obtaining Integrity? Reviewing and Examining the Charter between Higher Education and Society.” *The Review of Higher Education* 27(4): 429-459.

early 1970s.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps this means faculty have not lost their voice in governance, and that the institutional purposes traditionally attributed to higher education remain intact. Yet the importance of curriculum management has become overshadowed by the other activities in which the university engages. Administration retains primary control over construction planning, strategy, and budgeting, and it is through budgeting that academic departments are starved or cultivated. And, as some argue, perhaps administrators are more qualified to manage the university to succeed in a competitive environment.<sup>16</sup>

As contestation over the appropriate governance mix in higher education continues, colleges and universities continue to grow and diversify. Mallon describes an interesting organizational dynamic in the modern university, “suburbanization,” a condition whereby the core administrative, research, and teaching structures sprout semi-autonomous offices of distance learning and technology transfer, corporate alliances, for-profit divisions, and various research centers and institutes.<sup>17</sup> These entities on the periphery of colleges and universities are more corporate and hierarchical, and are organized under the entrepreneurial power of the entities’ leader rather than a shared governance community of faculty and administration. The “loose-coupling” which characterizes the connections between university colleges, academic departments, administrative services, and the host of new “suburban” entities has permitted modern universities to simultaneously maintain communal as well as hierarchical decision-making units, and for these units to address diverse objectives and missions.<sup>18</sup>

## History and Mission of Harvard University

Established in 1636 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard began as a college of less than 20 students with its primary role being to train Puritan ministers. Once supported by the state of Massachusetts, the college became private in the mid-1800s and began to accumulate a significant endowment, reaching \$22.5 million by 1900. By the turn of the 20th century Harvard’s enrollment had increased to 3,000 and its faculty to 278. In the latter 19th and early 20th century it added separate schools of Business, Dental Medicine, and the Arts and Sciences. Today Harvard employs 14,000 people, approximately 2,300 of whom are faculty, and enrolls nearly 7,000 undergraduates per year. An additional 13,000 students study in the graduate schools. Harvard’s endowment has swelled to \$30 billion, making it one of the wealthiest non-profit institutions in the world, with two to three times the endowment of any other American university.<sup>19</sup>

Harvard is considered to be the most prestigious American, if not global, university. It has been called the “north star” of American higher education because of the influence that it holds over other institutions of higher learning.<sup>20</sup> Rare changes in Harvard’s curriculum (in the types of courses required and the underlying justifications for change) serve to frame curricula revisions in other universities. For example, Harvard’s curriculum revision of 1945, colloquially known as the “Red Book” due to the report’s red cover, set the standard for higher education in the post-war era. The report called for the study the science and the texts of the European humanist tradition, arguing that

<sup>15</sup> Kaplan, Gabriel. 2002. “How Academic Ships Actually Navigate.” Presented at the Cornell Higher Education Research Institute Conference, September 20, 2002.

<sup>16</sup> Duderstadt, James J. 2001. “Fire, Ready, Aim: University Decision-Making during an Era of Rapid Change.” In *Governance in Higher Education: The University in a State of Flux*. Werner Hirsch and Luc Weber, Eds. Pages 26-51. London: Economica Ltd.

<sup>17</sup> Mallon, William. 2004. “Disjointed Governance in University Centers and Institutes.” *New Directions for Higher Education*, 127: 61-74.

<sup>18</sup> “Loose coupling” is a organizational science term used to characterize the weak, circumscribed and/or infrequent contact between subunits in an organization. Weick, Karl E. 1976. “Educational Organizations as Loosely Coupled Systems.” *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 21(1): 1-19. See also Clark Kerr “The Multiversity” for a discussion of the expanding roles of the university in the mid and late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>19</sup> Bradley, Richard. 2005. *Harvard Rules: The Struggle for the Soul of the World’s Most Powerful University*. New York: Harper Collins.

<sup>20</sup> Clayton, Mark. “Will Summers head Harvard in a Bold New Direction?” *Christian Science Monitor*. (March 31, 2001).

both were essential to sustain American values of freedom and democracy. The Red Book provided a rationale for the liberal arts emphasis which characterized the American college experience in the post-war years.<sup>21</sup>

Harvard University does not have a single mission statement that applies across its 10 separate schools and faculties. The Faculty of Arts and Sciences, which includes Harvard College (the undergraduate education arm of Harvard University), provides two items on its “Mission Statement” web page. The first is a quote from the College’s initial charter of 1650, indicating that Harvard exists for the “advancement and education of youth in all manner of good literature, arts, and sciences.” The second item is a 1997 comment by Harry Lewis, former Dean of Harvard College, noting that the college is charged with creating an educational experience that “liberates students to explore, to create, to challenge, and to lead.”<sup>22</sup>

### Organization and Governance

Harvard University is made up of 10 academic units, including the Harvard business, divinity, education and medical schools. The largest entity, the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS), encompasses Harvard College, the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, and the Division of Continuing Education. Of Harvard’s 2,325 faculty members in 2008, 980 resided in FAS.<sup>23</sup>

Governance of Harvard is shared between trustees, the faculty, and the president and his or her administrative appointees. While this split is typical of American universities and colleges, governance relations at Harvard are considered unique in American higher education because of the tremendous autonomy held by its academic units. The colloquial term used to refer to the organizationally and financially separated units is “each tub on its own bottom” (ETOB), a reference to the independence of each unit in keeping its own financial head above water. Each unit generates its own tuition revenue, decides on curriculum and grading, has a distinct academic calendar, makes its own budgets, conducts its own fundraising, and controls its own endowment. The Dean of each unit is selected by the university president. Governance within the FAS is led by the Dean and the Faculty Council, a group of 17 elected faculty members who serve as the liaison between the administration and the faculty. During the tenure of the two prior Harvard presidencies (of Derek Bok, 1971-1991, and Neil Rudenstine, 1991-2001), the relevancy of the Faculty Council appeared to have waned. This was seen as a combination of faculty apathy – as one council member noted, “though obviously university governance and committee work is necessary, people naturally like to avoid it,” – and faculty satisfaction with the status quo and the agreeable relationship between the faculty and administration.<sup>24</sup>

The administration, consisting of the president of Harvard and his or her appointments, has historically exercised only limited control over the resources commanded by each of the federated units. The president appoints the deans, approves each academic unit’s final budget, and has the final say on tenured appointments. While each entity conducts its own fundraising, the office of the president retains approximately 3% of the funds raised, which are then used for the president’s own initiatives. The president can also raise funds. Neil Rudenstine conducted the first university-wide capital campaign at Harvard, a five-year \$2 billion fundraising drive.<sup>25</sup> Through the fundraising initiative and the promotion of other cross-school and cross-disciplinary collaborations, Rudenstine sought to forge

<sup>21</sup> Smith, Wilson, & Thomas Bender. 2008. “Introduction,” pages 1-11 in *American Higher Education Transformed: Documenting the National Discourse*, Wilson Smith and Thomas Bender, Eds. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins.

<sup>22</sup> Accessed May 5, 2009: <http://www.harvard.edu/siteguide/faqs/faq110.php>

<sup>23</sup> Faculty counts refer to full-time equivalents. See *The Harvard Factbook*, Accessed May 1, 2009, [http://www.provost.harvard.edu/institutional\\_research/archive/2005OnlineFactBook.pdf](http://www.provost.harvard.edu/institutional_research/archive/2005OnlineFactBook.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> Andrew S. Chang, “Apathy Spurs Faculty Changes,” *The Harvard Crimson* (February 21, 1996).

<sup>25</sup> Christian B. Flow and Clifford M. Marks. “Under New Regime, Harvard’s Tubs Find a Common Bottom.” *The Harvard Crimson* (June 4, 2008).

closer organizational ties among the university's federated parts. As had been experienced by prior presidents, however, attempts to centralize decision-making were resisted by the separate schools, and Rudenstine admitted at the close of his presidency that he'd been unable to make substantial headway in this area.<sup>26</sup>

The third component of governance at Harvard is the two trustee bodies: the seven-member Harvard Corporation, and the 30-member alumni Board of Overseers. The Corporation is responsible for overseeing the day-to-day management of the University's finances and business affairs. The Corporation consists of the current university president and six fellows who serve indefinitely and choose new members when an existing member chooses to retire. The Corporation has historically been dominated by white businessmen. Its first female member, lawyer Judith Hope, was elected in 1989, and its first member of color, Conrad Harper, an African American lawyer, joined in 2000. At the time that Lawrence Summers was selected as president, The Corporation consisted of current president Rudenstine, one lawyer, one retired university president, and five current or retired corporate executives. The autonomous functioning and degree of secrecy (no agenda or meeting summary is distributed from its twice monthly meetings) is a second signature feature (in addition to the federated ETOB structure) of Harvard organization and governance.

The second trustee body is the 30-member Board of Overseers. Board members are elected by Alumni for six-year terms, with 20% turnover in the body each year. While the Board of Overseers ostensibly has as much control – in the sense of advisory capacity to the president – as The Corporation, it is widely acknowledged that The Corporation wields much more power.<sup>27</sup> The alumni board can advise, but administrative control rests with The Corporation and president.

### **The Presidency at Harvard: 1971-2001**

Harvard has had just 28 presidents during its 373-year history, with most presidents serving for a decade or longer. During the rare times when a new president is chosen, The Corporation has made the choice to address weaknesses that it sees in the university and to chart a particular course for the future.<sup>28</sup> In Derek Bok (1971-1991), Fellows saw a mediator who could avoid the turbulence of the late 1960s. Bok, a law scholar and former Dean, relied on persistence and persuasion to tackle major initiatives during his administration: a revamping of the curricula, the establishment of research centers and academic programs to address pressing social issues, and support for the arts. He enlarged the power of the central administration, adding a number of positions to the administrative bureaucracy. He was well-liked among the faculty and seen as a stabilizing force during his two-decade tenure. As one Harvard professor noted, “he reminded Harvard of its mission: to train the leaders of a great nation that would navigate the shaping of the world.”<sup>29</sup>

Neil Rudenstine assumed the presidency in 1991. Even more so than Bok, Rudenstine had substantial administrative experience in academia. He had served as dean and then provost at Princeton, and then as an executive vice-president of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. He was selected for his administrative experience, as well as his ability to fundraise successfully. Although well-liked among faculty, Rudenstine's tenure was seen as somewhat uninspiring. Shortly after Rudenstine's announced resignation in May 2000, an editorial in *The Harvard Crimson* claimed he had “stripped Harvard of strong leadership,” and as a result “the University [had] receded to the shadows

---

<sup>26</sup> Bradley, Richard. 2005. *Harvard Rules: The Struggle for the Soul of the World's Most Powerful University*. New York: Harper Collins.

<sup>27</sup> Bradley, Richard. 2005. *Harvard Rules: The Struggle for the Soul of the World's Most Powerful University*. New York: Harper Collins. Page 62.

<sup>28</sup> Keller, Morton and Phyllis Keller. *Making Harvard Modern: The Rise of America's University*. NY: Oxford University Press.

<sup>29</sup> Bradley, Richard. 2005. *Harvard Rules: The Struggle for the Soul of the World's Most Powerful University*. New York: Harper Collins. Page 40.

of the ivy tower and Ivy League obscurity.” Rudenstine is most widely credited with two accomplishments: being a hugely impressive fundraiser, raising the schools endowment from \$4.1 in 1991 to over \$25 million at his departure, and his development of the Department of African and African American Studies, which attracted national and international attention to Harvard.

## Lawrence Summers: Harvard’s 27th President

### Choosing the New President

The search committee for a new president convened in September 2000. The committee, like The Harvard Corporation to which it would present its selection, was dominated by current and former corporate executives. The committee consisted of six Fellows and three members of the Board of Overseers. It was widely known that The Corporation was seeking someone more “aggressive, pushy, [and] bolder”<sup>30</sup> in style than Rudenstine, someone who could move Harvard into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Corporation members were “looking for a new face with new ideas, an agent of change who could think outside the higher education box.”<sup>31</sup> Trustees, faculty, and students shared the view that Harvard needed a president who would put Harvard back in the national spotlight, speak more forcefully on issues of the day, and work to revitalize the undergraduate experience.<sup>32</sup> Harvard’s reputation as the standard-bearer in American higher education had been shaken by reports of student dissatisfaction and a slip in the college rankings. Compared to high-tech powerhouses like Stanford, Harvard seemed sluggish and dated, a tired old engine chugging along on the steam of past glories. Harvard, financially flush with endowment monies, was poised to resume its preeminent position in American higher education and lacked only dynamic leadership.

The list of possible presidential candidates quickly narrowed to two. Lee Bollinger, a law professor and the president of the University of Michigan since 1996, was the more qualified by traditional standards. He’d served as provost of Dartmouth and Dean of the Columbia Law School as well as president at Michigan. Lawrence Summers, the other candidate, had a more eclectic background but no administrative experience in academia. Summers earned an economics degree at MIT in 1975 and a Ph.D. in economics from Harvard in 1983. Harvard subsequently hired him as a full professor, and as such he became the youngest tenured faculty member in the school’s history. In the 1980s, Summers entered the political arena, becoming a member of Ronald Reagan’s Council of Economic Advisors and then serving as economic advisor to Dukakis’ campaign for president in 1988. Summers resigned from Harvard in 1991 to become Chief Economist at the World Bank, and then held positions in the Department of the Treasury, eventually rising to Secretary of the Treasury in May of 1999.

The Harvard faculty reportedly preferred Bollinger to Summers, but neither faculty nor students have a formal role in the choice of the president. The trustee bodies alone approve or reject the search committee’s choice. The fact that Bollinger was the “safe” pick may have worked against him, since Corporation members were pushing for a change. Choosing Summers would also be in keeping with the more general trend in presidential picks in higher education. College presidents with backgrounds outside of academia have been on the rise. As one manager of an academic search firm notes, “from a board member’s standpoint, if you define the president’s job in terms of the things you see your president talking about at board meetings – fund raising, politics, marketing, financial management, and still more fund raising – more than a few candidates from outside the academy seem to present competitive portfolios.”<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Comments of a Corporation member who spoke with James Traub for *The New York Times* article “Harvard Radical” (August 24, 2003).

<sup>31</sup> Comments of one Harvard Corporation Fellow during the presidential search process, as reported by the *The Boston Globe* (March 18, 2001).

<sup>32</sup> Rosenheck, Daniel K. “Harvard Faculty Expect Much More Public Persona from New President.” *The Harvard Crimson* (March 12, 2001).

<sup>33</sup> Basinger, Julianne. “Colleges are More Likely to Find Presidents Outside Academe: Most Chiefs Still White Men.” *Chronicle of Higher Education*. (December 13, 2002).

In March 2001, Lawrence Summers accepted the presidency. Immediate reactions from faculty and the Harvard administration were positive, though a few expressed concerns over Summers' reputation as overly ambitious and arrogant.<sup>34</sup> But the negative comments were more about his personal traits than about his ability to lead the university in new and promising directions. "More than ever, higher education is connected now to the financial world and to the world of government, and Larry Summers can move comfortably in all of those worlds," said faculty member Judith Block McLaughlin, director of Harvard's higher education program.<sup>35</sup> "I have a strong sense of *carpe diem*," said Jeremy Knowles, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. "There is a real opportunity for some visionary directions for the institution in the coming decades."<sup>36</sup>

Summers outlined his vision for Harvard in the months before officially assuming the presidency on July 1. At a news conference in mid-March, he noted his priorities at Harvard would include improving undergraduate education, recruiting younger faculty members, maintaining a commitment to diversity, and fostering cross-disciplinary programs.<sup>37</sup> In an interview with PBS in April, he mused on the contemporary conditions facing the modern university, stating that "the nations, the businesses, the individuals that succeed in the next century will be those that grapple effectively with...[the] three forces of globalization, technology, and the power of markets."<sup>38</sup> In his inauguration speech on October 11, 2001, Summers listed key objectives for his term – a renewed emphasis on the undergraduate experience, including a revamped curriculum that focused as much on science as on the humanities; expansion of the campus to the Allston neighborhood across the river from Cambridge; and globalization of the university.

Summers enacted a number of specific policies over the next several years that aligned with these objectives. A curriculum review report was initiated, the first step in replacing the existing curriculum with new requirements placing more emphasis on scientific and technical knowledge. He solidified plans for the Allston campus and committed resources to new research facilities, most notably a state-of-the-art stem cell research center. To bring about greater contact between undergraduates and faculty, Summers expanded a series of freshman seminars taught by renowned professors, and he supported the hiring of more faculty to improve Harvard's professor-to-student ratio.<sup>39</sup>

The way in which he pursued his initiatives confirmed the fears of those who had worried about his reputation as arrogant and aggressive. In contrast to the soft-spoken previous president Rudenstein, Summers was widely regarded as brash and argumentative, even among his faculty supporters.<sup>40</sup> Summers runs meetings like dissertation hearings, one dean said, "always playing the devil's advocate."<sup>41</sup>

Harvard trustees had hoped that Summers would simultaneously modernize the university and help it regain its preeminent post as standard-bearer in American higher education. Summers' contentious relationships with some of the Harvard faculty and a series of controversial public remarks, however, led to a sputtering start for his tenure.

<sup>34</sup> Gewolb, Joshua E. "From Harvard to D.C. and Back." *The Harvard Crimson*. (March 8, 2001).

<sup>35</sup> Basinger, Julianne. "Harvard Picks Former Treasury Secretary as its Next President." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. (March 23, 2001).

<sup>36</sup> Wilgoern, Jodi. "Former Treasury Secretary is Picked to Lead Harvard." *The New York Times*. (March 12, 2001).

<sup>37</sup> Basinger, Julianne. "Harvard Picks Former Treasury Secretary as its Next President." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. (March 23, 2001).

<sup>38</sup> Quote from the PBS interview in Bradley, Richard 2005. *Harvard Rules: The Struggle for the Soul of the World's Most Powerful University*. New York: Harper Collins.

<sup>39</sup> Zengerle, Jason. "Harvard Coup." *The New York Times Magazine*. (March 7, 2005).

<sup>40</sup> Fogg, Piper. "Where's Larry?" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. (March 4, 2005).

<sup>41</sup> David Gellis, "In Media Debacle, Some See Lessons for New President," *The Harvard Crimson* (January 4, 2002).

## Early Indicators of Change: Cornel West and the Department of African American Studies

Taking office July 1, 2001, Summers moved quickly to indicate a change in the leadership of the president's office and his control over power and resources. His first staff appointments went to veterans of Washington, rather than recent Harvard graduates who typically took such positions. Because he hired from Washington, Summers was perceived by some as sending a message that he wanted an inner circle that was loyal foremost to him, above any loyalty to the institution.<sup>42</sup> As he made initial visits among the faculty he apparently intentionally slighted one of the signature departments at the university, that of African and African American Studies (AAAS). As reported by Bradley in his book on the Summers presidency, while Summers talked with most of the departmental heads within weeks of taking office, he only belatedly contacted Henry Louis Gates, head of AAAS and arguably the most highly regarded scholar of African American studies in the world. When Gates alluded to the belated meeting, hinting that he "could have shown [Summers] around...why didn't he call him earlier?" Summers reportedly replied, "because that's what everyone told me I should do."<sup>43</sup>

A subsequent meeting between the AAAS faculty was reportedly tense. Summers took pains to make it clear that AAAS would no longer have a "blank check," as it had during Rudenstine's tenure. When asked his position on affirmative action, Summers shocked the group by questioning its efficacy, saying "the jury's still out." And yet Summers had indicated in other forums that he strongly supported affirmative action. In a later interview Summers said he demurred because he "didn't do litmus tests."<sup>44</sup>

Summers again wrangled with the AAAS just three months later in a meeting with one of its most well-known faculty, University Professor Cornel West.<sup>45</sup> Based on West's account of the meeting held October 24, 2001, Summers questioned West's commitment to "serious" scholarship, chiding him for a recent release of a spoken word CD. He suggested that West's pursuit of projects of personal interest were contributing to the erosion of Harvard's reputation for academic excellence. Perhaps in response to recent stories in *The Boston Globe*, which reported the unusually high percentage of Harvard students graduating with honors (91%), Summers suggested West was contributing to Harvard's problem of grade inflation. He also accused West of missing numerous classes to engage in political campaigns.<sup>46</sup> The content of the meeting hit the newspapers in December and prompted well-publicized forays to Harvard by Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson to protest West's treatment. After months of very public speculation – with numerous reports in *The Boston Globe* and *The New York Times*, among other news outlets, Cornell left for Princeton in April 2002. Over the next four years another four more members of the AAAS left for positions at other universities.

Negative publicity from the Cornel West incident would follow Summers throughout his five-year presidency. Yet a number of alumni regarded Summers' actions as laudable – a bold move to recapture the power of the presidency

<sup>42</sup> Bradley, Richard. 2005. *Harvard Rules: The Struggle for the Soul of the World's Most Powerful University*. New York: Harper Collins. Page 142-143.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. Page 91.

<sup>44</sup> Traub, James. 2003. "Harvard Radical." *The New York Times Magazine*. (August 24, 2003).

<sup>45</sup> The position of university professor designated West as part of an elite group of 17 professors who have the greatest leeway of any at Harvard to set their own research agendas and to teach across disciplines. University professors report directly to the president, rather than to individual departments.

<sup>46</sup> The exchange between West and Summers from West's viewpoint has been reported in numerous newspapers, in an article by West, and in Richard Bradley's (2005) account of the first four years of Summers' presidency. Summers himself has not given a detailed account of the meeting.

and get Harvard back to the serious business of scholarship. Letters to the alumni office in the months after the incident reportedly ran three-to-one in favor of Summers.<sup>47</sup>

Where some observers saw racism as the major dynamic in the Summers-West incident, and others simply Summers' social ineptitude, for many faculty the incident was a dark harbinger of rising administrative threats to academic freedom. While university and college faculty members are in one sense "employees" of the university, they are also governing members as well as independent scholars. As such they can be interpreted to hold a unique position in American society – protectors of the past, creators of the future, and critics of the present. Whereas administrators at a private university are held accountable to the president, trustees, and those who provide resources (e.g., students, their parents, alumni donors, foundations, etc.), faculty loyalty is to their discipline and their energies to the larger intellectual purpose that they serve.<sup>48 49</sup> Many wondered what the implications would be for Harvard if the president or others in the administration tried, or at least were perceived as trying, to determine the direction of faculty research.

### Summers in the News, Again

After West's resignation in April 2002, just as the incident seemed to be dying down as a subject of media speculation, Summers reappeared in the news. This time it was a remark made during the president's annual morning-prayers address at Harvard Memorial Church on the first day of fall classes, September 17, 2002. In the previous year Summers had used the address, held days after the attacks of September 11th, to talk about the healing power of learning. This year Summers warned of a rise in anti-Semitism and he alluded to activities at Harvard—a website and letter signed by 71 faculty calling for Harvard to divest its endowment holdings in Israeli companies—as "anti-Semitic in their effect if not their intent."<sup>50</sup>

Summers' remarks were widely reported and stirred up debates both about university investments and the use of anti-Semitic rhetoric. A number of faculty members reportedly interpreted the president's remarks as part of a continuing pattern, beginning with Cornel West, of trying to dictate research and quell academic and political freedom on campus. John Assad, an assistant professor of neurobiology at Harvard Medical School and signatory of the Harvard divestment petition, told *The New York Times* on September 21, 2002, that "we are essentially being told there can be no debate." In defense, Summers claimed that he was speaking as a member of the community, not as president of Harvard. But as one Harvard professor contended, "that's like George W. Bush saying, 'oh, this is off the record.'"<sup>51</sup>

Two years would pass before Summers made his most infamous remarks, those regarding women's aptitude for math and science. Speaking in January 2005 at a National Bureau of Economic Research conference on diversifying the science and engineering workforce, Summers suggested that "intrinsic issues of aptitude" might account for the disproportionate representation of men in advanced sciences and engineering. Significantly, these comments came

<sup>47</sup> Bradley, Richard. 2005. *Harvard Rules: The Struggle for the Soul of the World's Most Powerful University*. New York: Harper Collins. Page 123.

<sup>48</sup> Accountability is defined as the obligation to report to others, to justify actions and explain how resources have been used and to what effect. Trow, Martin. 1996. *Trust, Markets & Accountability in Higher Education: A Comparative Perspective*. Research and Occasional Paper Series: CSHE.1.96. University of California, Berkeley: Center for Studies in Higher Education. Page 3.

<sup>49</sup> Berberet, Jerry. 2002. "A New Academic Compact: Revising the Relations Between Faculty and Their Institutions." In *A New Academic Compact*. Linda McMillin and Jerry Berberet, Eds. Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing Company. Pages 3-27. Also see Bergquist's contrast between the "managerial" and "collegial" cultures within the university in, Bergquist, William. 1992. *The Four Cultures of the Academy: Insights and Strategies for Improving Leadership in Collegiate Organizations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

<sup>50</sup> Bradley, Richard. 2005. *Harvard Rules: The Struggle for the Soul of the World's Most Powerful University*. New York: Harper Collins. Page 185.

<sup>51</sup> Bartlett, Thomas. "A Surge of Anti-Semitism or McCarthyism." *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (October 4, 2002).

after a fall report that only four out of the thirty-two professors to whom Summers had approved tenure in 2004 were women, and just weeks earlier a group of female Harvard faculty questioned this low number in a letter to Summers.

The reaction from all quarters to Summers' remarks was explosive, and his resignation, which did not occur until the following year, is often connected to this single event. While certainly the event caused a great deal of negative press and embarrassment for Summers, equally consequential for his eventual resignation were behind-the-scenes conflicts between Summers and the faculty over issues of university governance and accountability.

## Making Harvard Modern

### Acceptable Scholarship at Harvard

Summers' conversation with Cornel West and comments made in succeeding months revealed the type of faculty work that fit the new president's vision of a modern Harvard. Scholarly work consisted of scholarly output – books, journal articles – and practical applications. Shortly after the West incident became public, and after Summers had rejected a faculty proposal for a new Latino-Studies center, Summers noted in an interview that, “it would be much better if two more books that stood the long test of time were written over the next decade at Harvard than if we created two new centers on issues of the day.”<sup>52</sup> And yet interdisciplinary centers were a part of the vision for Harvard if they focused on science and had tangible outputs. Summers helped establish an interdisciplinary biomedical research initiative – The Broad Center – between MIT and Harvard in 2003, and in 2004 construction plans were made for the Harvard Stem Cell Institute.

### Globalizing the University

Summers' focus on “globalizing” the university meant practical applications, not simply discussion of issues. In early 2002, Summers attended a forum with the faculty of the Graduate School of Education about trends in globalization. In a later interview, Summers said of the meeting, “They were going in the direction that globalization pointed to the need for more education directed at multicultural understanding. And I said that I thought globalization meant global competition, and that it made the basic capacity to read and do arithmetic more important.” Asked by the interviewer what the response had been, Summers ruefully observed, “It was seen as a distinctive perspective.”<sup>53</sup>

Summers let it be known that no department was immune from scrutiny. He questioned the existence of small departments and obscure areas of study. To rest on tradition was equated with complacency. As Summers explained, “The greatest danger for a university is to be complacent and comfortable. I have tried to resist the idea that the fact that we have done things in a certain way is the reason why we should continue to do things that same way.”<sup>54</sup>

Distance-learning was another potential means of globalizing Harvard. Summers advocated a shorter residency requirement for students enrolled in distance programs, and the requirement was reduced from one year to eight weeks.<sup>55</sup> He justified this as due to modern lifestyle changes – “The question has arisen as lifestyles change and it becomes more difficult for midcareer professionals to come to the university for part of their career.”<sup>56</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Wilson, Robin, and Scott Smallwood. “Battle of Wills at Harvard.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (January 18, 2002).

<sup>53</sup> Traub, James. “Harvard Radical.” *The New York Times*. (August 24, 2003).

<sup>54</sup> Washington Post, June 24, 2004. Reported in Bradley, page 219.

<sup>55</sup> <http://www.extension.harvard.edu/2008-09/programs/undergrad/distance.jsp>. Accessed May 5, 2009.

<sup>56</sup> Young, Jeffrey. “Harvard Reviews Rule for On-Campus Courses.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. (March 22, 2002).

It also appears that he may have hoped to capitalize on the Harvard brand by marketing more of its curriculum. In April 2003, a report commissioned by Summers noted that Harvard had the opportunity to “develop distinctive course materials for use in, and potentially, beyond, Harvard College.”<sup>57</sup> This would have been in keeping with his vision of moving Harvard into the world, globalizing Harvard by training world leaders with Harvard-crafted knowledge. As Summers said in a speech in January 2002: “Harvard exists for only one reason: the future of the world depends more than anything else on what young people learn and go forth and do.”<sup>58</sup> Spreading the Harvard brand for graduate and undergraduate programs could have followed the successful marketing model of Harvard Business School. The school’s mail-order catalog of 7,000 products has been called “the L.L. Bean of graduate business education.”<sup>59</sup>

### **Making the University Nimble**

To move Harvard in the directions Summers desired, he could have worked within the system of shared governance, using persuasion, cooperation, and compromise to bring faculty in line with his thinking. But this would take time. Summers was not interested in cajoling faculty members, as had Neil Rudenstien, nor carefully cultivating their cooperation, as had been the reputation for Derek Bok (president, 1971-1991).<sup>60</sup> A more expedient option was to exploit the existing powers of the president to their full potential and expand decision-making power to tasks that were currently out of range.

University presidents typically have minimal direct impact on faculty, and at Harvard even less so than at other universities because of its “tub” structure. The Harvard president’s power comes from control over the administration – the deans of each school (who he can appoint but not fire) and his or her own administrative personnel (who he can appoint and fire, and to which he can add by creating new positions). Summers could apply indirect and verbal pressure on faculty, however. He and Provost Steven Hyman set up a process whereby each of the academic deans, who did need Summers’ approval of their annual budgets, were required to make highly detailed documents listing academic and budgetary plans for the short and long term. Then Summers and Hyman sent out administrative representatives from their offices to examine the plans with each schools’ dean.<sup>61</sup>

Summers made it clear to the dean of the Kennedy School of Government that the school could no longer run deficits and to the dean of the law school that it needed to improve its management to stem the loss of both students and scholars to other law schools. He cited the law schools’ “idiosyncratic choices” in awarding tenure and voiced concerns about “inbredness [*sic*], political correctness, and lack of intellectual energy” among law school faculty.<sup>62</sup> As a result of pressures to change, the law schools’ dean resigned. The faculty sought to appoint a committee to find a successor, a move seen as a power play against the president, since the power to appoint deans resides with the president. Summers went to the law school on the day the committee was to be established to make it clear that he had the sole responsibility to appoint a new dean. Ultimately, he appointed a dean that was widely accepted by faculty.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Bradley, Richard. 2005. *Harvard Rules: The Struggle for the Soul of the World’s Most Powerful University*. New York: Harper Collins. Page 334.

<sup>58</sup> From Summers “Remarks at Tobin School,” January 9, 2002, as reported in Bradley (Ibid).

<sup>59</sup> Hill, Sam and Glenn Rifkin. 1999. *Radical Marketing—From Harvard to Harley, Lessons from Ten that Broke the Rules and Made it Big*. New York: Harper Collins.

<sup>60</sup> Bradley, Richard. 2005. *Harvard Rules: The Struggle for the Soul of the World’s Most Powerful University*. New York: Harper Collins.

<sup>61</sup> Traub, James. “Harvard Radical.” *The New York Times*. (August 24, 2003).

<sup>62</sup> Traub, James. “Harvard Radical.” *The New York Times*. (August 24, 2003).

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

The Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS) is in some realms considered as powerful as the president. In the summer of 2002, the prior dean, who had worked during Rudenstein's era, was replaced by William Kirby, a historian who once chaired the history department. Kirby came to be viewed as a Summers' puppet (and was portrayed as such in a *Harvard Crimson* cartoon). Rather than acting as a leader of and advocate for the faculty, Kirby reduced FAS power by signing off on a fundraising rule change which had the potential to redirect alumni contributions away from FAS and toward the office of the president.<sup>64</sup> Kirby also appeared complicit in Summers' desire to oust the popular Dean of Harvard College, Harry Lewis, in March 2003. It was widely known that Summers and Lewis had divergent views – Summers was an advocate of cutting extracurriculars, bringing more “rigor” to the Harvard experience and promoting individual excellence, while Lewis noted the need for administrators at Harvard to conceive of the university as a community, and “to think about how Harvard can produce not just better scholars...but better and more committed ordinary citizens.”<sup>65</sup> Since the Harvard president has only the power to appoint, and not fire, deans, the only way to replace Harry Lewis was if he quit, which seemed unlikely. To remove Harry Lewis, Kirby informed Lewis that the administration was being restructured, and that Lewis' position was eliminated. Students were upset, and it was over this incident that the *Crimson* cartoon appeared. It pictured Summers as a puppeteer, pulling strings attached to Kirby as he booted Lewis out of office.<sup>66</sup> In January 2006, Kirby himself was apparently kicked out of office by Summers. Reports surfaced that Kirby had been pressured to resign after being criticized by Summers for the slow pace of curricular reform.<sup>67 68</sup>

## Building Biotech

Summers was enamored with biotechnology and the promise that it held for a modern Harvard. He had already worked to bring scientists into existing administrative positions, hiring neuroscientist and former director of the National Institute of Mental Health, Steven Hyman, as his Provost. And in the fall of 2004 he created a new position under Hyman, a vice-provost to oversee and coordinate the licensing and sale of Harvard discoveries to outside companies.<sup>69</sup> The vice-provost would carry out Summers' and Hyman's vision of growing Harvard as a biotech center. The procedures for licensing and sale of biotech discoveries at Harvard were already in place, and certainly Harvard was well known in the biotech field, leading in the number of biotech papers published and cited.<sup>70</sup> The key was to commercialize the discoveries. As Hyman said in spring 2003, the goal was “making [technology transfer] something that is considered a normal thing to do.”<sup>71</sup> To facilitate this cultural transition among individual faculty, Hyman and Summers sponsored a workshop in the fall of 2002 to counsel graduate students and professors on the process of starting their own biotechnology companies with Harvard-patented technology.<sup>72</sup>

Summers' interest in biotech was construed by some as directing resources away from other areas, specifically the arts and sciences. Faculty outside of the life sciences probably did not find very humorous Summers' joke that “the modern University [could] be thought of as a medical complex with some classrooms for other fields attached”<sup>73</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Bradley, Richard. 2005. *Harvard Rules: The Struggle for the Soul of the World's Most Powerful University*. New York: Harper Collins. Page 226. The rule change allowed donors to receive “class credit” (to have their donation count toward their Harvard class' tabulated total donations) even if it was given to the office of the president rather than to Harvard College or the FAS.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* Page 236.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* Page 239.

<sup>67</sup> Wilson, Robin. “The Power of Professors.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. (March 3, 2006).

<sup>68</sup> Finder, Alan. “Harvard's President is Again at Odds with His Faculty.” *The New York Times*. (February 24, 2006).

<sup>69</sup> Ciarelli, Nicholas M. 2004. “Harvard Seeks to Raise Tech Revenue.” *The Harvard Crimson* (November 12, 2004).

<sup>70</sup> Garlow, Stephanie. 2006. “Harvard Lags in Tech Transfers.” *The Harvard Crimson*. (September 25, 2006).

<sup>71</sup> Marks, Stephen. “Tech Transfers on the Rise.” *The Harvard Crimson* (April 15, 2003).

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Text of Grandberg Lecture in Primary Care, Harvard Medical School, November 29, 2001. [http://www.president.harvard.edu/speeches/summers\\_2001/biomedical.php](http://www.president.harvard.edu/speeches/summers_2001/biomedical.php)

As he had on other occasions, Summers would likely have defended such remarks as simply his own opinion, not indicative of university policy. As literary theorist and legal scholar Stanley Fish noted in a 2005 article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, “When he speaks, everyone listens, and everyone listens to him *as* the president of Harvard...his pronouncements (wise and foolish) are always uttered ex-cathedra and can never be detached from the responsibilities of his office.”<sup>74</sup>

### Threatening Shared Governance

Calling on the traditional model of shared governance, whereby the university administration handled finance, real estate, construction and the like, Summers could make the case that his office should lead with regard to technology transfer. And even though faculty were upset that they would have no input on the expansion into Allston,<sup>75</sup> again this part of governance has traditionally been under administrative control. The curriculum, however, is an area most clearly regarded as within the province of faculty. The president can call on the faculty to review the curriculum, which Summers did soon after taking office. Instead of stepping back and letting the faculty consider and engage, however, Summers took an increasingly active part in guiding, and many say controlling, the faculty’s work.

Discontent also grew among the faculty as Summers added new levels of bureaucracy. New positions had the effect of separating faculty departments from the administration. Three divisional deanships to oversee the humanities, social sciences, and physical sciences were created in 2003, and in 2005 three new vice-provost positions were added.

Institutional transparency and control of information also became an issue. *The Harvard Crimson* reported a change in its ability to investigate and report as Summers asserted control over the faculty. Reporters noted that members of the Faculty Council would not make comments to *The Crimson* on university issues because they did not want to anger Dean Kirby or others in the administration.<sup>76</sup>

By crossing into the faculty’s areas of expertise and by growing the administrative arm of shared governance, Summers actions changed the existing relationship between administration and faculty, and with it assumptions about accountability and institutional purpose. Would faculty become accountable to the administration rather than to their disciplines? Who would dictate the areas of research – The Corporation? Could the “entrepreneurial” professors in the life sciences objectively evaluate biotechnology when they had a financial stake in it? What might all of this mean for the reputation of Harvard, and the institution of higher education, as an independent, supposedly objective entity, unique in society? Would Harvard become just another well-run business?

While discontent simmered among the faculty, there were still supporters of Summers who were pleased with the substantive changes he had made. And regardless of faculty unrest, the only body that had sway over Summers and the only one which could force his ouster was The Corporation, which continued to express support for the president. After all, Summers was moving forward on the objectives that he had laid out when he assumed the presidency.

---

<sup>74</sup> Fish, Stanley. “Clueless in Academe.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. (March 4, 2005).

<sup>75</sup> On a number of occasions the faculty expressed their displeasure at being shut-out of discussions having to do with which departments would move from Cambridge to Harvard’s land in the Allston neighborhood across the river. They were rebuffed each time by Summers. For example, see: Marks, Stephen and Rebecca O’brier. “Faculty Council Looks to Change Allston Input Balance.” *The Harvard Crimson* (December 1, 2003).

<sup>76</sup> Gellis, David H. and Kate L. Rakoczy. “The Iron Curtain Lowers Over University Hall.” *The Harvard Crimson* (February 5, 2004).

## One Opinion Too Many: Summers Comments on Gender and “Innate Abilities”

Summers’ “aptitude” comment about women at the National Bureau of Economic Research meeting in Cambridge on January 15, 2005, was one of many controversial statements made in public forums, but none other would attract such widespread criticism and cause such embarrassment at Harvard. Many understood Summers’ comments to be patently sexist and dismissed his claim that he sought only to “provoke thought.” On January 18, the Faculty of Arts and Sciences’ Committee on Women, chaired by Kenan Professor of English Marjorie Garber, drafted a letter to President Summers emphasizing how his remarks served “to reinforce the institutional culture at Harvard that erects numerous barriers to improving the representation of women on faculty and to impede our efforts to recruit top women scholars.”<sup>77</sup>

Whereas Summers’ previous controversial statements had been little commented upon by Harvard students, the remark on gender hit home. Jessica Jones, a biological anthropology major said, “I think the evidence in favor of an ‘innate abilities’ explanation of the gender gap is very weak. The evidence in favor of a ‘social forces’ explanation is very strong.”<sup>78</sup> Other students, however, saw the brouhaha as a distraction and wanted the faculty and administration to get back to serious business, such as the reformation of the curriculum.

Finding himself at the center of a media frenzy, Summers released an apology in an open letter to Harvard four days after his original remarks: “I was wrong to have spoken in a way that resulted in an unintended signal of discouragement to talented girls and women,” he wrote. At first Summers’ office refused to release the transcript of his remarks. When they were finally released on February 17, over a month after the speech, they not only reignited discussions over this incident but caused many faculty to reevaluate his work as president, and as representative, of Harvard University. Clearly for many faculty, Summers gaffe only deepened a rift that had been growing for some time. As Professor Theda Skocpol remarked, “The crisis of governance and leadership goes much deeper.”<sup>79</sup> Perhaps the most embarrassing public condemnation of his statements came from an open letter published in *The Boston Globe* on February 12 by the presidents of Stanford, MIT, and Princeton. The letter stated that “speculation of ‘innate differences’ may be a significant cause of underrepresentation by women in science and engineering and may rejuvenate old myths and reinforce negative stereotypes and biases.”<sup>80</sup>

In the weeks following his controversial remarks, Summers repeatedly apologized and tried to make amends. He set up two task forces charged to recommend concrete ways to recruit and provide better support for female professors. At the head of these committees he placed some of his most ardent critics. In June, he appointed Theda Skocpol, who had repeatedly and publicly questioned his leadership of the university, as Dean of the Graduate School.<sup>81</sup>

Nothing Summers could do in the immediate aftermath, however, could slow the barrage of public criticism. At the FAS meeting in late February Summers faced stinging criticism from faculty, who called him not only on his conference remarks but more generally on his callous and bullying leadership. One speaker accused him of creating “show committees” while he actually made all the decisions.<sup>82</sup> Faculty scheduled a no-confidence vote for Summers to take place at the next meeting on March 15. On the eve of that meeting, *The Harvard Crimson* reported that 32%

<sup>77</sup> Hemel, Daniel. “Summers Draws Fire for Remarks on Women.” *The Harvard Crimson* (January 19, 2005).

<sup>78</sup> Hemel, Daniel. “Summers Comments on Women and Science Draw Ire.” *The Harvard Crimson* (January 14, 2005).

<sup>79</sup> Mara, William C. & Sara E. Polsky. “Tense Past Jeopardizes Summers’ Future: For Faculty, President’s Remarks are Catalyst, Not Sole Cause of Clash.” *The Harvard Crimson* (February 17, 2005).

<sup>80</sup> Bombardieri, Marcella. “Three University Chiefs Chide Summers on Remarks.” *The Boston Globe* (February 12, 2005).

<sup>81</sup> Wilson, Robin. “Critic of Harvard President is Named Dean.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. (June 17, 2005).

<sup>82</sup> Fogg, Piper. “Where’s Larry?” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (March 4, 2005).

of 280 faculty members polled thought Summers should resign, while 55% thought he should not. It was unclear until the no-confidence vote was taken whether or not it would pass – it did, with 218 for, 185 against, and 18 abstentions.

Regardless, the faculty could only express their unhappiness with the president, as only The Corporation has the power to remove him. The Corporation continued to show support for Summers, first in a letter from the Fellows to the FAS, and then verbally at the March 15 meeting.<sup>83</sup> And yet even within The Corporation, displeasure with Summers appeared. In July 2005, Conrad Harper, a New York City lawyer and Corporation member since 2000, resigned, citing his disagreement with a Corporation-approved pay raise for Summers and concerns over Summers' conduct, which he said displayed "profound issues of temperament and judgment." In his letter of resignation, he also said that Summers should resign.<sup>83</sup> Five years earlier as a member of the presidential search committee, Harper had helped choose Summers and had enthusiastically proclaimed that "the new president is excellent."<sup>84</sup>

Faculty did get a tangible victory after the no-confidence vote, however. Two Corporation Fellows met with the Faculty Council in April to inform them that Summers would no longer be involved in any way with the curriculum review. Up to that point, he had been a driving force, which had served as a major point of friction.<sup>85</sup>

More significantly for Summers' presidency, the ire of the faculty toward him had energized faculty governance. A new group, The Caucus of Chairs, formed in the spring of 2005, largely as a defensive organization whose goal was to limit Summers' alleged heavy-handed governance of FAS affairs. One of the caucus' first public actions was to publish a letter in *Harvard Magazine* following Conrad Harper's resignation. The July 2005, letter was addressed to The Corporation, who would be choosing Harper's successor, and called on the Fellows to appoint someone who would "have deep knowledge and a close affiliation with the academic world."<sup>86</sup>

## Lawrence Summers Resigns

Six months after Corporation Fellow Harper resigned, another high-profile resignation was attributed to Summers. Dean of FAS Bill Kirby announced his resignation in January of 2006. While Kirby claimed the resignation was by mutual consent, it was widely assumed he had been forced out. The Faculty Council demanded a say in who the new dean would be. This was an astounding move from the council, which had long been a complacent group. Their demands were seen as an historic resurgence of faculty interest in issues of university governance. A report by *The Crimson* in February also revealed that faculty members had been meeting secretly with Corporation members since the previous spring, initiating an historically nonexistent relationship between the two bodies.<sup>87</sup>

In February 2006, FAS planned agenda items for the next meeting. One item on the docket was a motion asking faculty to call on The Corporation to intervene in the escalating battle between professors and the administration. A second motion would poll the faculty as to whether they continued to lack confidence in Summers' leadership, in effect creating a second no-confidence vote for the president.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Fain, Paul. "Harvard Board Member Steps Down, Citing Clashes with President." *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (August 12, 2005).

<sup>84</sup> Miller, Andrew. "Administrators Meet Summers." *The Harvard Crimson*. (March 13, 2001).

<sup>85</sup> Marra, William. "Review to Go On without Summers." *The Harvard Crimson*. (May 11, 2005).

<sup>86</sup> Jacobs, Evan H. & Anton S. Troianovski. "Chairs Seek Growing Influence in FAS." *The Harvard Crimson*. (December 19, 2005).

<sup>87</sup> Jacobs, Evan H. & Anton S. Troianovski. "In Motion, Professors Look to Corporation." *The Harvard Crimson*. (February 14, 2006).

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

On February 21, 2006, Lawrence Summers officially resigned from his office, ending the most controversy-filled and shortest tenure of a Harvard president since the Civil War. Speaking with *The Crimson*, Summers offered that “It looked to me like the magnitudes of the rifts with certain segments of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences were at a level where I thought it would be very difficult for us to advance on a whole set of fronts.”<sup>89</sup> When asked about what he would have done differently with the benefit of hindsight, Summers answered that he “would have adopted [his] style in a way to build more collegial relations with the Faculty of Arts and Sciences group.”<sup>90</sup>

## Post-script

Derek Bok, Harvard’s president between 1971 and 2001, stepped in as interim president after Summers resignation. Drew Faust, a historian and dean of the Radcliffe Institute, was chosen as the 28th president and took the helm of Harvard on July 1, 2007. Colleagues lauded Faust for her people skills and ability to lead by persuasion.<sup>91</sup> In her first written remarks to the Harvard community, she reflected on how her profession as historian had prepared her for the Harvard presidency: “I am a historian. I have spent a lot of time thinking about the past, and about how it shapes the future. No university in the country, perhaps the world, has as remarkable a past as this one. And now our shared enterprise is to make Harvard’s future even more remarkable than its past.”<sup>92</sup>

In 2007 Harvard released its long-awaited curriculum overhaul. The first sentence of the report reads as follows: A Harvard education is a liberal education – that is, an education conducted in a spirit of free inquiry undertaken without concern for topical relevance or vocational utility.”<sup>93</sup>

In November 2008, Summers returned to political life, accepting the position of the chief of the White House National Economic Council within the Obama Administration.

---

<sup>89</sup> Javier C. Hernandez, “Summers Resigns: Shortest Term Since Civil War; Bok Will be Interim Chief,” *The Harvard Crimson*. (February 22, 2006).

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Wilson, Robin. “Harvard’s Historic Choice.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. (February 23, 2007).

<sup>92</sup> Harvard University Gazette. “Remarks by President-Elect Drew G. Faust.” Downloaded on May 1, 2009 from <http://www.news.harvard.edu/gazette/2007/02.15.99-statement.html>.

<sup>93</sup> The Harvard Report on General Education. 2007. Presented by the Task Force on General Education. Accessed May 25, 2009 from: [http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~secfas/General\\_Education\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~secfas/General_Education_Final_Report.pdf).