

The End of a Presidency

AFTER FIVE YEARS of frequent controversy over matters of fundamental academic and intellectual substance, and over the style in which those issues were pursued, the Harvard presidency of Lawrence H. Summers will end on June 30. During his unexpectedly brief tenure, questions about how the University should develop faculty, teach students, and organize research in the twenty-first century were constantly raised but incompletely explored. That leaves much work for Harvard's transition leadership, and for Summers's ultimate successor, who must also help calm the community and refocus its energies on its academic mission.

The news itself was announced on the University website at 1:00 P.M. on Tuesday, February 21, the day after Presidents' Day. (For links to the news release and letters from Summers and the Corporation, see www.harvardmagazine.com.) Befitting a man who created news nonstop, the announcement prompted a crush of users seeking access to the release, causing electronic gridlock that rendered the statements temporarily inaccessible.

The Corporation's letter makes these key points:

- Summers will serve through the end of the academic year. Following a sabbatical, he plans to return to the faculty. The Corporation intends to appoint him to a University Professorship, Harvard's highest professorial rank, upon the completion of his presidential service.

- He will be succeeded July 1, on an interim basis, by Derek Bok, who was Harvard president from 1971 to 1991. [For Bok, who led the University after the turmoil of the late 1960s—the antiwar protests, occupation of University Hall, and forcible removal of those sitting in by police officers—the new tour of service represents a second call to calm troubled waters.]

- Provost Steven E. Hyman “will carry forward in his vital role.”

- The Corporation will have “more to say soon about the search for a new president, which we intend to launch

promptly, and about other pending matters that will require attention in the coming weeks and months.”

The statement was signed by James R. Houghton, Nannerl O. Keohane, Robert D. Reischauer, James F. Rothenberg, and Robert E. Rubin—the current Corporation members other than Summers. Patricia A. King, who has been named a member, has not yet begun her official service.

The Corporation, saying it had accepted Summer's resignation with regret, cited his service to Harvard for its “extraordinary vision and vitality,” animated by “a sense of bold aspiration and initiative, a prodigious intelligence, and an insistent devotion to maximizing Harvard's contributions to the realm of ideas and to the larger world.” As examples of the University's “invigorated” academic programs and keener engagement with “complex challenges facing society,” the Corporation cited work on the undergraduate curriculum; the University's international agenda; the “pursuit of new intellectual frontiers,” within and across departments and schools; enhanced financial aid for students from lower-income families and graduate students pursuing work in public-service careers; faculty appointments; and planning for Allston development, particularly in the sciences.

The past year, the Corporation noted, “has been a difficult and sometimes wrenching one.” It exhorted members of the community to “look forward in a spirit of common enterprise”—scholarship and education.

IN HIS OWN LETTER, Summers cited “rifts between me and segments of the Arts and Sciences faculty” as the factor making it “infeasible for me to advance the agenda of renewal that I see as crucial to Harvard's future.”

He then presented a sort of brief for what had been his presidential agenda. “Believing deeply that complacency is among the greatest risks facing Harvard,” Summers wrote, “I have sought for the last five years to prod and challenge the University to reach for the most ambitious goals in creative ways.” Acknowledging that there “surely have been times when I could have done this in wiser or more respectful ways,” Summers wrote of

his “sense of urgency” stemming from a conviction of Harvard's special ability to “make a real difference in a world desperately in need of wisdom of all kinds.” He also spoke of “laying some of the foundations for what may come.” (This was an eerie echo of Faculty of Arts and Sciences [FAS] dean William C. Kirby's resignation letter of January 27; Kirby wrote, “we have set a strong foundation.” The furor following Kirby's announcement, and the manner in which the end of his deanship was handled, widened the fissures between president and faculty, as revealed at the faculty meeting of February 7. See “Arts and Sciences Dean to Leave Office,” March-April, page 58, and an account of the February 7 meeting on our website, www.harvardmagazine.com

Summers cited as priorities work on the undergraduate curriculum and student social life and spaces; “renewal of the faculty” at a time when “the median age of our tenured professoriate is approaching 60”; extending financial aid (“Given the resources that strong endowment returns have made available, there is much more that can and should be done to sustain a University-level commitment to financial aid”); “unprecedented commitments to science and technology” and to engineering; overcoming “artificial boundaries of departments and schools,” requiring an increased willingness to “transcend parochial interests in support of broader University goals”; and the planned Allston campus. He also made note of “strains and moments of rancor.”

Implicit in some of his observations is the perspective Summers brought to his presidency: that the College was not educating its students as well as it could; that Harvard had become, or risked becoming, complacent; that prodding was necessary to effect desired change; and that such change was urgent. When married to Summers's especially forceful personality—immediately following the gentle, almost self-effacing manner of President Neil L. Rudenstine—these characterizations were a sure formula for unsettling members of the community, constructively or not.

DURING A 35-MINUTE telephone news conference that began at about 3:45 P.M.,

Senior Fellow James Houghton summarized the Corporation's written statement before Summers spoke. The president began by saying, "This is a day of mixed emotions for me." He summarized his accomplishments, before acknowledging that he felt "very much regret for the rifts and cleavages that have emerged" between himself and what he defined as "segments" of the FAS. He had come to reflect on that during the past couple of weeks, Summers said, and then just during the last week reached the decision to make way for new University leadership. (In a subsequent interview with the *Crimson*, he said he had decided on his course of action on Wednesday, February 15, before departing on a planned skiing vacation with his children.)

Responding to an initial question about the "complacency" he had cited, Summers said that Harvard was a "very different place" from five years ago, having "unlocked a great deal of questioning and restless energy," especially among students and, he said pointedly, younger scholars. Given the opportunity to comment on those who disagreed with him, Summers characterized them as "sincere and not politically motivated."

Nonetheless, he said, his decision to step down had been prompted by "the extent of the rancor that had emerged" and the extent to which he personally "had become a large issue" within the faculty. He thus "very reluctantly" concluded that the University and his "own satisfaction" would best be served by stepping down. He felt he had "worked very hard over the last year to build bridges to meet members of the faculty part way" on issues of concern and of control, but it became clear that for a substantial segment of the faculty, the gap could not be closed.

Although he consulted with the Corporation, the president said that resigning "was my decision." Any governance issues the University may have do not concern the Corporation, which has shown "continuing commitment to an aggressive agenda of renewal"—even as "there are certainly challenges such an agenda has to overcome." Rather, the challenge is "to make plans and make decisions that transcend the parochial inter-

ests" of individual schools—a view he said was not particularly shared in FAS. A successor president should be equipped with "a lot of energy, a lot of patience, a lot of ability to engage with what is both an academic and a very political environment." He or she would be "well advised to think very carefully about the need to assure that as the University sets its course, there are mechanisms for broad inclusion of students as well as faculty" from all schools.

Was there a risk, a reporter asked, that in ceding the office, Summers would allow a "small vocal group" within a faculty to "take down" Harvard's president, threatening to make the University ungovernable? "As I assessed the situation, I very much had the concern that you referred to," Summers said, but concluded that making way for new leadership was in the institution's best interest, and his own.

Asked if the University were excessively complex, he said he chose to describe its "marvelous variety," reflecting almost nostalgically about his involvement in subjects from erecting a huge new telescope to promoting understanding of Islam to fostering knowledge about how children can learn. It has been "my approach and my conviction that all of that could best be harnessed, be enhanced, by seeking to do more, to do it in bolder ways that had more impact." It was to that end that he had sought to be challenging: for many members of the community, that had "very positive results," but for others, "it was threatening." In retrospect, he said he might have more successfully advanced the University's interests by showing more reverence for its traditions. Trying to do "a lot of things quickly" had the virtue of getting many things done fast, but the effect also of promoting more rapid growth of "resistance." Had he been able, as he noted in his letter, he would have "preferred to stay longer," to bring to completion more of his vision for Harvard in the early twenty-first century.

He then left Massachusetts Hall for a rally outside with student supporters, and a photo op for the evening news broadcasts, the next morning's newspapers, and the University website.

HOW, THEN, did Summers's resignation come about, making his the briefest Harvard presidency since Cornelius Conway Felton (1860-62) died in office? (Poignantly, in the current context, Samuel Eliot Morison's *Three Centuries of Harvard* quotes Felton as confiding to a colleague that "there is no more comparison between the pleasure of being professor and president in this college than there is between heaven and hell.") Was this vigorous president, a skilled student of power, suddenly overwhelmed by a "segment" or "segments" of one faculty? And why did matters come to a head at this moment?

Although much more remains to be learned (if it is ever disclosed), the president's own comments, referring to developments during the past two weeks, suggest some of what unfolded.

The January 27 leak, deliberate or inadvertent, of Dean Kirby's resignation—ahead of his plan to discuss his departure with his senior staff and to release the news broadly on February 1—and the characterization by anonymous sources of that departure as Kirby's firing by Summers, was obviously personally wounding to Kirby. With Summers at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, into that weekend, while the College was still on its intersession break, the news itself and the manner of its dissemination struck many FAS professors as a sign of deep-seated differences between the president and their faculty, and emblematic of persistent leaks, innuendoes, and management by indirection.

Some of those concerns may have appeared directly on the Board of Overseers' and the Corporation's radar during their regularly scheduled meetings on February 5 and 6. By chance, Kirby's periodic briefing with the Governing Boards to set tuition was on the agenda, giving him an opportunity to air his perspective.

Clearly, both Summers and the faculty realized that the atmosphere had been altered as the new term began. At the FAS faculty meeting on February 7, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich—speaking for its Faculty Council, and with the prestige of the 300th Anniversary University Professorship newly conferred on her by Summers—outlined a plan, negotiated with

Summers in a series of meetings, for unprecedented faculty involvement in forming a committee and then participating through it in the search for Kirby's successor. Summers had never gone beyond gathering an informal advisory group for decanal searches. Having already dealt with the Faculty Council (FAS's own elected representatives) and having responded to the intense faculty concern about the situation in agreeing to this concession, Summers may have felt that a plan was in place to proceed with FAS's business, and the University's.

But instead the meeting proceeded in a sharply different direction. Fifteen speakers rose to challenge Summers's truthfulness; to object to the manner in which Kirby had been treated; to question Harvard's moral position in the wake of the federal litigation against the University and Summers's friend Andrei Shleifer, Jones professor of economics (see "Russia Case (and Dust) Settle," November-December 2005, page 59); to question whether fundraising could be conducted in the prevailing circumstances; to express doubt that a dean could legitimately be appointed; to suggest doing without the proposed search committee and instead to proceed, somehow, to a direct appointment endorsed by the Corporation, without any presidential role in the process; and, most ominously, to raise the specter of a future vote of no confidence in the administration. No one spoke on Summers's behalf.

It was impossible not to recall the faculty meeting of February 22, 2005, when a group of three senior faculty members (including FAS dean emeritus Jeremy R. Knowles) attempted to advance a process for communicating professors' concerns to the Corporation, only to see the suggestion swiftly swept aside by wary colleagues. (That meeting was followed by the faculty's 218-185 March 15 vote that it lacked confidence in the administration, an outcome that clearly surprised Summers and his supporters; see "At Odds," May-June 2005, page 55.)

The proceedings of the meeting this February 7 suggest that the president—always well briefed, confident on his feet—was again taken by surprise. His responses to the criticisms, when offered,

were general, formulaic, and repetitive. Nor was Summers likely expecting a renewed confrontation when he had scheduled a business trip to New York the next day, complete with an appearance at a fiftieth-reunion dinner.

The Faculty Council, for its part, found itself unable to go forward in formally recommending the proposed faculty-driven search committee. In the face of colleagues' evident dissatisfaction, the council met twice, and on February 15 issued a statement: "On balance, having considered the options, we believe that a plan resembling the one put forth at the February 7 meeting, giving a strong role to the Faculty in the process, would be the most appropriate. However, a significant number of faculty have expressed doubt that any search at this time could succeed because they lack sufficient confidence that it would result in a dean who could enjoy the support of both the President and the FAS. As a result, we believe that this issue must be resolved before the search for the next FAS Dean can begin." The restrained phrasing did not mask the council's conclusion that nothing could, or should, happen with the president in place.

As Summers conferred with counselors, Corporation members, family, and friends—and Corporation members continued their information-gathering queries and conversations—deadlines for a resolution began looming. By February 13, when the preliminary agenda was set for the February 28 FAS meeting, Weary professor of German and comparative literature Judith L. Ryan had moved ahead with her proposal for a new no-confidence motion. Another proposed motion called on the Corporation to collaborate with the faculty and to inject itself more directly and forcefully in current questions of governance and management. The meeting was scheduled for Sanders Theatre, because the Faculty Room in University Hall (the customary location) could not nearly accommodate the expected crowd. The agenda would become final on February 21, a day later than usual, to accommodate the Monday holiday.

Summers and his backers reportedly sought expressions of support from pro-

fessional-school deans and faculties, eliciting relatively little public comment, and assessed how to conduct a fight for his presidency. Other advisers weighed in with opinions on what conducting such an effort would entail, and what the aftermath would be if Summers lost another no-confidence motion—and by a larger margin than a year ago, as informal vote-counting suggested might very well be the case. Looming in May is publication of *Excellence without a Soul: How a Great University Forgot Education* by McKay professor of computer science Harry R. Lewis '68, Ph.D. '74, former dean of Harvard College, who was removed from his position in 2003. Lewis can equal Summers in speaking bluntly. In his words, "The book takes the long view on several old problems but also gives my own analysis on the current state of affairs," the latter certain to be sharply critical of the Summers administration. It was one thing to absorb the journalistic critique of Richard Bradley's *Harvard Rules: The Struggle for the Soul of the World's Most Powerful University*, published early in 2005. It would be more difficult by far to absorb a second round, from an informed insider and life-long Harvardian.

On February 16, the *Boston Globe* reported that the former dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS), Peter T. Ellison, Cowles professor of anthropology, attributed his decision to step down in 2005 to Summers's actions. In a statement he prepared, dated February 14, Ellison wrote that his dealings with the president, like Dean Kirby's, unfolded in "a similar pattern, involving undermining the authority of a dean in front of others, hollow statements of support, and denials that appear less than fully truthful.... This does not seem to me any longer to be a matter of style or personality, but of character. It may be the way people treat their colleagues and subordinates in Washington, but it is not the way it has been done, or should be done, in an institution like ours. When someone with the skill and integrity of Dean Kirby does not flourish in his post, something is seriously wrong. I would not now recommend to any colleague that they consider serving as dean under this President."

By then, Summers or the Corpora-

tion—or both—had reached the conclusion that a change would take place. The Corporation would not likely welcome being the subject of a faculty motion, and given what he had described as his “searing” experience last year, it is unlikely that Summers himself looked forward to a protracted, even more heated extension of the February 7 exchanges at the next faculty meeting. Derek Bok, who had announced publicly on February 13 his intention to step down as chair of Common Cause’s national governing board, had already been contacted informally about the succession; a formal request was made early in the Presidents’ Day weekend.

Whenever the terms of Summers’s separation were negotiated, the conferral of a University Professorship provided a graceful exit. (It is a sharp irony that the first issue publicly dividing FAS members from the president was his interaction with Fletcher University Professor Cornel West, who subsequently left Harvard for Princeton.) Whether the president, who relinquished his professorial duties in 1991 to work at the World Bank and then the U.S. Treasury, ultimately returns to academia (he has recently taught a freshman seminar and co-taught a Core course) or pursues a career in the private sector or government, the promised professorship provides at least an interim position for what was evidently an outcome arrived at quickly and under time pressure.

WAS THE PREMATURE END of this administration caused by a faction of one faculty exercising undue power, or generating unwarranted resistance to needed change? And where does Harvard head next?

It would be presumptuous to try to aggregate the opinions of thousands of individual faculty members, or to guess at the private thought processes of Corporation members, and it is far too soon to attempt a history. But it seems fair to hazard that the events of the last few weeks were no more narrowly about the departure of a single dean than were the harsh confrontations in early 2005 solely motivated by differences of opinion over Summers’s controversial remarks about

the role of women in academic science and engineering.

Then, as reported (see “At Odds,” May-June 2005, page 55), distinguished faculty members from a variety of disciplines spoke about their sense that the president, in pursuing change, had claimed “sole agency” to do so, soliciting and then ignoring informed counsel, and resorting to “bullying and personal aspersions,” humiliating faculty members, and even silencing their opinions. Summers at that time acknowledged the criticisms and promised to pursue “a combination of things” to improve the situation, from adapting his style to rethinking the “roles of the central administration and deans” on curriculum (“very much the responsibility of the faculty”), to consulting on matters like Allston planning that are “inherently Universitywide in their significance,” and to “more transparent ways” of conducting academic planning centrally and in the schools. Over time, he hoped, those steps would yield “both continued momentum and a necessary rebuilding of trust.” Summers began the academic year with a new chief of staff, his third, and a new personal press spokesman. He was lower key in his personal appearances and tempered his visible involvement in faculty policymaking.

But in other respects, the decisions he had made earlier have not been revisited, and remain flashpoints for diverse members of the University community.

To cite one example, work on Allston has proceeded on its former course, with the appointment in January of a chief operating officer and a separate organization reporting directly to Summers, apart from all other University real-estate activities. The announcement on February 17 of a site and architect for a first building complex, comprising some 500,000 square feet of laboratory space, made tangible Summers’s vision of a third locus for scientific research—even as FAS is building extremely expensive and as yet unfilled labs, and Harvard Medical School has unused space (now leased out) in its New Research Building.

Because the central administration has collected since the beginning of the decade a “strategic infrastructure fund” assessed on all schools’ endowments—

now totaling more than \$100 million annually—it is better able to finance such new ventures than even some of the schools themselves. Doing so has large financial implications for the teaching faculties whose professors will work in any new location, and academic repercussions for how appointment, teaching, and budget decisions will be made. Creating an institute like the stem-cell effort, and determining to locate it in new Allston space, raise real, unresolved questions about how to relate to and adapt departmental and school boundaries and authorities.

Though such questions may seem internally focused, they reach deep into the disciplinary organization of the modern research university. In this sense, one person’s perception of “complacency” or “resistance” is another’s vision of how academic talent has been developed, teaching encouraged, and new knowledge evolved. Such differences can be resolved, but not with a snap of the fingers. The same questions arise as other institutes are contemplated, and as the Harvard School of Public Health, for example, pursues its mission alongside the administration’s robust new Harvard Initiative for Global Health, or the Graduate School of Education formulates a comparable initiative on public schooling, another administration priority. Both those schools’ faculties have had differences with Summers.

Those schools, and others whose graduates pursue public service, also depend urgently on the prospective fruits of a Harvard-wide capital campaign. Summers effected important measures to centralize fundraising, in part on the promise to increase donors’ gifts beyond their “home” schools in support of the less-well-endowed faculties. The delay in concerted fundraising is particularly challenging for these schools, whose graduates typically do not earn enough to make very substantial gifts. And as reported, even FAS—the best endowed faculty—is laboring under significant financial strain as it tries to pay for recent hiring and extensive construction (see “Fraught Finances,” March-April, page 61).

The current anxieties, in other words, extend throughout much of the Univer-

sity, and form part of the very large agenda for the interim president, who must reach out to reassure faculty, students, and alumni worldwide. The transition will likely begin, moreover, with significant staff vacancies. In the news conference, Summers said he hoped to complete searches for new deans for Harvard Business School and the education school. The FAS deanship, he indicated, would land on the interim president's to-do list. FAS's search for a successor dean of engineering and applied sciences, a key growth area, is now under way, but may not be easily concluded in the current unsettled circumstances. The vice president for finance, Harvard's chief financial officer, is departing at the end of March. And further turnover in the Massachusetts Hall and University Hall staffs is surely in

the offing. Harvard Management Company's new leadership, on whose investment results every school now heavily depends, is just settling in, and faces important staffing and strategic challenges of its own (see "El-Erian for the Endowment," January-February, page 54).

After a breathtaking and bruising five years, the University appears stimulated by visions for the Harvard of the twenty-first century—and more than eager for a leader with the managerial skill and finesse to enlist more members of the community in refining those visions and making them a reality.

Until June 30, a battle-weary community seems to want an uneventful conclusion to the decanal and presidential terms of William Kirby and Lawrence Sum-

mers. Thereafter, Harvard's hopes are invested in the interim return of Derek Bok. He brings to the task not only a successful presidency and strong connections to Harvard constituencies, but also continuing engagement with issues in contemporary higher education. (His newest book, published in December, interestingly concerns undergraduate education, curriculum reform, and effective pedagogy; see "A Collage of Colleges," January-February, page 57.)

In the official statement communicating his new service, Bok said simply, "I will do my best to carry out the Corporation's request. There is no institution I care about more deeply, and I will make every effort to work with colleagues to further the University's agenda during this transitional period."