

The Radcliffe Campaign Launch – October 28, 2013  
Address by Dean Elizabeth Cohen  
(as prepared)

Welcome to our dinner under the stars—and with our stars, meaning you! Thank you to everyone here and particularly to our magnificent Campaign co-chairs, Sid Knafel and Susan Wallach—our North Stars—for their incredible guidance as we launch The Radcliffe Campaign.

You're joining us tonight with our programs in full swing. Fifty new fellows have eagerly set up shop in Byerly Hall. The Institute is abuzz with lectures, conferences, and workshops. And the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America is welcoming students and researchers from all over the world.

Everything we've shared with you during the Open Yard today exemplifies our commitment to creativity and cutting-edge thinking.

And you make all this possible.

Thanks to you, bold thinkers and artists in our Fellowship program will have the time and resources to do their best work.

Thanks to you, staff at the Schlesinger will take 45 hundred boxes of manuscripts off the shelves to share with researchers this year. In the last decade alone, the authors of more than 10,000 books have used—and cited—our collections.

Thanks to you, faculty from across Harvard and around the world will convene at Radcliffe in groundbreaking, multi-disciplinary seminars and workshops.

And thanks to you, we can open Radcliffe's doors to public intellectuals like *New York Times* columnist Gail Collins, who shared the story of the progress of American women in the 20th century with a standing-room-only crowd last week. We expect the same enthusiasm for Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi on Thursday, for MIT biotech pioneer Robert Langer this winter, and for Eve Ensler this spring, among many others.

The launch of our campaign coincides with planning for next May's celebration of the Radcliffe Institute's 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

In just 15 years, we have realized the ambitions of our two previous and exemplary deans, Drew Faust and Barbara Grosz—both here with us tonight—and our faculty, staff, and volunteers, to become one of the world's leading and most unique institutes for advanced study. No other institute brings together the sciences, social sciences, humanities, and the arts. No other institute seeks out scholars at all stages of their careers. And no other institute includes students, public intellectuals, and general audiences in its vision for advanced study.

But as you know, the origins of what we do, and who we are, go back much further.

In 1892, when Henrietta Swan Leavitt graduated from what became Radcliffe College, women weren't allowed to use telescopes. Instead, she worked at the Harvard Observatory with a group of women called "computers," hired to catalog the stars from photographs of Peru's night sky. But Leavitt didn't simply

record information. She also interrogated it. By thinking like a scientist, Leavitt made important breakthroughs that modern astronomers still value.

The photographs Leavitt studied were the Big Data of her time. They provided information on a vastly larger scale than ever before. But then, as now, data are not knowledge. In our digital age, this distinction is as crucial—if not more so—than it was in Leavitt’s time. We can gather massive amounts of information rapidly. And we can circulate it more quickly than ever.

But big data still need big ideas and big thinkers to create knowledge. And knowledge needs time to develop.

But in the 21st century, we expect fast thinking and instant results. This pressure for immediate payoff can exact huge costs from scholars and students, and from a public hungry for real understanding.

The Radcliffe Institute promotes a different—deeper—method of creating value. We invest for the long term in talented individuals and their brilliant ideas to produce genuinely new knowledge.

Short-term thinking—along with deep cuts in research funding—has endangered all fields of knowledge. The arts and humanities have been assaulted by simplistic expectations that they prove their cash value.

How can we understand the revolutionary changes of “Arab Spring” or the complexity of immigration reform without the rigorous, imaginative work of sociologists, historians, anthropologists, and artists, like those featured at our last two Gender Conferences?

Yet in 2011, humanities research received only 1 half of 1 percent of the funding higher education dedicated to R & D for science and engineering.

The sciences are vulnerable too.

This year the NIH will fund 700 fewer grants than it did last year. Having fewer opportunities for basic research threatens our nation’s competitiveness.

How can we launch the next generation of scientific discoveries if young researchers, discouraged by dwindling funding, leave the laboratory?

That’s why the Radcliffe Institute’s first Campaign Priority is to invest in our capacity to experiment.

Just as venture capital invests in the entrepreneurs of industry, so we invest in the entrepreneurs of ideas. Original thinkers need time, space, and resources to pursue curiosity-driven research. By challenging common assumptions and crossing disciplinary boundaries, this work can transform how we think and act.

Imagine funding more projects like playwright Sean Graney’s new production, which combines all 32 Greek tragedies into a single, 12-hour performance. It’s a gutsy project, one that will reconnect audiences with the very origins of Western civilization. And Sean is here this year as a Radcliffe Fellow to finish the project and produce it with the A.R.T.

Two weeks from now, experts in biology, nanotechnology, materials science, and design will gather for our Science Symposium on Smart Clothes. Imagine materials that can heal bodies and protect soldiers! This isn't something out of a Matt Damon movie. It's cutting-edge engineering. And we will showcase it here.

Since 1999, we have funded nearly 700 Radcliffe Fellows. But with a 5 percent acceptance rate, it's more difficult to become a Radcliffe Fellow than to win admission to Harvard College.

Each year we say no to worthy individuals desperate for the time and resources to pursue original projects. With this Campaign we can say yes to endowing more fellowships to support ambitious thinkers with break-through ideas.

In the digital age, innovative ideas come from all kinds of people located all across the globe.

That's why our second Campaign Priority is to diversify our programs and expand our global reach.

The collections of the Schlesinger Library now have an eager global audience, thanks in part to early efforts to digitize them. But we are saying no to digitizing more materials. And we are saying no to acquiring collections that would deepen researchers' understanding of the past. We owe scholars an updated history—through collections that document the lives of women of color, and women from across the economic and political spectrum.

With support from the Campaign we can say yes to broadening our collections, and we can say yes to digitizing more of these materials, enabling a fuller—and a more widely shared—history of women and gender in America.

Harvard has become stronger by recruiting the best students from around the world. We must offer these students the finest, most diverse faculty. The Radcliffe Professors program, which provides select new Harvard faculty with two precious years as Radcliffe Fellows, plays a crucial role in helping Harvard attract a world-class faculty. This year, four new women scholars will join our two current Radcliffe Professors. These six outstanding scholars hold appointments in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, and the schools of government, law, and education.

With support from the Campaign we can say yes to more senior Radcliffe Professors, and we can create an exciting new initiative desired by Harvard's deans—Radcliffe professorships for highly sought-after tenure-track faculty to help Harvard recruit the next generation of visionary scholars and teachers.

In the current post-Recession landscape, students face narrowed horizons. That's why our third priority is to educate more students through collaborative research. With job prospects unsure, career-focused undergraduates are often wary of taking intellectual risks.

Each year we pair as many as a hundred Harvard undergraduates with Fellows through our hugely successful Radcliffe Research Partners program, getting them into the lab, the archive, and the studio. Working side-by-side with fellows encourages some students to enter academia, but more often it nurtures the kind of critical thinking that makes for outstanding leaders in the arts, business, and the professions.

Every year, we have more applicants than we can accept as Research Partners. With Campaign support, we can say yes to more undergraduates. And we can say yes to significant intellectual opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students through internships and research grants.

The challenges of the 21st century transcend any single discipline, field, or Harvard School. Our talented faculty need more opportunities and more resources to find intellectual partners in the far corners of Harvard.

That's why our fourth priority is to advance our impact across Harvard.

The Radcliffe Institute is Harvard's intellectual crossroads. More than any other school, we help Harvard faculty leave behind disciplinary and administrative constraints to explore common intellectual problems.

In the past decade, over 2,000 faculty and recent fellows have participated in our Exploratory Seminars and Workshops. When Radcliffe convenes scholars from across the University in multi-disciplinary conversations, these discussions expand knowledge—and they strengthen ties across Harvard. We saw this happen during last year's Science Symposium on Water. When an epidemiologist studying cholera in Haiti and an oceanographer studying changing sea levels consider the future of water with colleagues in engineering, geology, and public health, they create more comprehensive solutions to our most urgent challenges. And this year two economists, one from Harvard, are continuing the work as fellows, exploring new approaches for delivering clean water in the developing world.

Despite the proven success of these cross-school endeavors, we say no to half the proposals we receive.

With the Campaign we will say yes to more seminars that launch new research by faculty from across Harvard and beyond.

Public discourse in the Internet age means more information coming from more channels, confusing—rather than clarifying—the issues. Intellectually hungry audiences need trusted sources.

That's why our fifth and final priority is to share transformative knowledge with the public.

Radcliffe's public programs put outstanding scholars and artists in front of faculty, students, AND general audiences to help probe the vital issues of our age. Technology expands our reach far beyond Radcliffe Yard. Our librarians answer more than 3,000 questions by email every year. Through webcasts of Radcliffe lectures, almost 13,000 viewers watched Indian director Deepa Mehta discuss her films and more than 14,000 viewers learned more about the universe from astrophysicist Lawrence Krauss.

But right now, we're saying no to more lectures, conferences, and symposia that can introduce public audiences to new debates and deepen their understanding of complex issues. And we're saying no to more Visiting Scholars like musician Neba Solo from Mali, whose balafon concert electrified this room a year ago and whose presence helped us understand the political crisis in his country. With Campaign support we will say yes to opening Harvard's front door wider to more—and new—audiences.

When I returned to Radcliffe as Dean, ten years after my own fellowship year, I rediscovered the intellectual dynamism that runs through the Radcliffe Institute. Every day, I am energized by my work here and by supporters like you, who care about expanding knowledge and helping us reach for the stars.

When I listen to a Fellow's lecture or view an artist's exhibition, I recognize the importance of the protected time we offer.

When I participate in an exploratory seminar or a workshop, I witness the intellectual risk-taking that occurs when we bring people together.

When I see the Knafel Center filled to capacity for a public lecture, I know that we are reshaping civic discourse.

When I hear that scholars from Cambridge to Cambodia are accessing our digitized collections, or viewers from South America to South Asia are watching a lecture, I marvel at how technology expands Radcliffe's reach.

And when I meet undergraduates in the Radcliffe Research Partners Program, I discover how excited they are to work alongside a "real" historian or computer scientist or filmmaker.

All of this happens because you believe in the importance of advanced study, of stretching beyond the expected to the barely imagined.

We must continue to support advanced study, for the sake of those eager to undertake it and for the sake of our society. It's hard to quantify what's lost when an idea can't be thought, when an experiment can't be performed, when a painting can't be painted. But there are consequences: A cure that isn't found. Data that aren't analyzed. A concerto that isn't composed.

Tonight, I'm asking you to join me in The Radcliffe Campaign.

Your support will insure that Radcliffe continues to nurture the extraordinary people whose brilliant ideas will illuminate our world. Please join me in saying yes to the next big idea. To the next paradigm-shifting experiment. To the next awe-inspiring work of art.

You will be saying yes to the kind of deep and creative thinking that our world so desperately needs.

Thank you.