

Vision for Harvard's Future

Harvard is an amazing university, arguably the best in the Universe, and her finest days are still ahead of her. Below are my thoughts on Harvard's future, triggered by e-mails from over a hundred of my colleagues who nominated me for the humbling service position of President, following Drew Faust's announcement that she will step down at the end of June 2018.

The nomination was not my initiative; it was suggested by others and I am honored to be considered for the job. If given the opportunity to serve, my goal would be to strengthen Harvard academically, so that all of its faculty and students will be excited to take part in its worldwide leadership mission of education and research.

The next phase in Harvard's future (starting in 2018) should focus on academic performance, with fundraising centered around intellectual themes in the humanities and sciences, as a motivation for updating its infrastructure. This should go hand-in-hand with the academic planning for the Allston campus.

Harvard has not had a scientist as President for over 64 years; the last was [James Conant \(1933-1953\)](#), who served as chair of the Chemistry department prior to his appointment (hence providing a precedent to an appointment of a department chair as President). Science is an important component of education and research on campus as well as an attraction for support from entrepreneurs. We should take advantage of the cutting-edge research done at Harvard to engage potential donors who are excited about advances in science and technology. I meet some of these entrepreneurs on my regular visits to Palo Alto as chair of the [Starshot Initiative](#). In addition, it is particularly timely to have a scientist as president now as Harvard builds the Allston campus with emphasis on science and engineering (SEAS). Finally, a scientist can promote diversity in science most effectively and has credentials to counteract political pushback against science.

The Allston campus could enhance interdisciplinary ties between science & engineering and the humanities as well as other professional schools (such as the business and medical schools). This agenda was discussed at the Allston academic planning committee, of which I am a member.

I started my career with an interest in philosophy. As evident from my books and opinion essays, my passion is still with the humanities. I resonate with the notion of a broad education in both the humanities and the sciences. In 2016, I became the Founding Director of Harvard's [Black Hole Initiative \(BHI\)](#) - a unique interdisciplinary center that brings together scientists and philosophers from the Astronomy, Physics, Math, History of Science and Philosophy departments at Harvard (with funding of \$7.2M secured for the first three years of its operation). I arranged an unprecedented visit by Stephen Hawking to Harvard for two weeks during the inauguration of the center. In 2017, I obtained approval from GSAS to start an [interdisciplinary graduate program](#) on black holes, where students can take courses in both the humanities and sciences as part of their PhD education towards a thesis focused on the exciting research frontier of black holes.

I have been at Harvard for 25 years, served on half a dozen university-wide committees and mentored over 100 students and postdocs. As chair of the [Astronomy department](#) and director of [two Harvard centers](#), I came to know the Harvard system on both the macro and micro levels.

Below, I summarize my views on both internal and external challenges that Harvard faces. I am optimistic that all of these challenges can be met to secure a prosperous and bright future for our university. The key challenge in driving a car safely to its destination is to take the correct turns on the highway. One wrong strategic turn can bring irreversible outcomes, and therefore strategic vision is more important than tactical maneuvers. One should define the goals and then navigate towards them, rather than being guided solely by short-term political considerations.

In managing a large organization like Harvard the key for success is attention to our faculty and students (more so than the buildings they inhabit). The president has the ultimate responsibility for promoting the excellence of our faculty by chairing the ad-hoc tenure review meetings. Selection of excellent faculty promotes a strong record of research and teaching, attracts excellent students and brings in more external support from sponsors. Hence, people are the key to the success of Harvard.

It is important to keep the dialogue with our faculty intellectual, namely focused on the exchange of ideas, rather than bureaucratic, namely focused on the exchange of forms. Ideas, rather than “brick and mortar”, will inspire our community of scholars to contribute more than the sum of its parts. New forums for communication should be established between the faculty & students and the higher administration to compensate, for example, for the new layer of intermediate deans that was added in the Faculty of Arts & Sciences (FAS) over the past decade.

Improving the diversity of our faculty and students is of utmost importance. This includes diversifying in terms of socio-economic starting conditions, gender, ethnicity, race and **ideas**. The promotion of diversity of ideas implies accepting the legitimacy of opposing opinions and criticisms. This does not mean that all opinions are equal but rather that alternative opinions should be discussed and filtered based on merit and clear reasoning. Debate is healthy as we iterate towards a better future.

As we improve the financial model of the University, it is essential to aim at a quantitative approach with less bureaucracy and more transparency, and take advantage of the expertise of faculty in the departments of economics and government as well as in the Kennedy, business and law schools.

The external threats of a decline in federal funding could be partly compensated for by an increase in funding from the private sector. I have successfully applied this approach by securing funding (of over \$120M in total) for the [Institute for Theory and Computation \(ITC\)](#), [Black Hole Initiative \(BHI\)](#), and the [Starshot Initiative](#). At the same time, it is important to lobby in Washington for continuous funding of basic research, in particular in the life sciences. And more generally, it is crucial to counteract the pushback against science, be it in the context of climate change or any other field of research.

An intellectual vision should guide fundraising efforts and plans for Allston. The investments in physical assets (renovation of buildings) should serve the investments in intellectual capital. Harvard's Allston campus can be used to foster exciting interdisciplinary research by creating a foundation for collaborations across traditional boundaries between disciplines. An example for a theme that would appeal to a broad range of fields in both the humanities and sciences is "Big Data". The Allston campus can also be used to enhance relations with the high-tech and bio-tech industries, with emphasis on benefits to society. Education could benefit from advances in computer technology and electronic communication by taking advantage of online resources and the unprecedented reach of the internet.

On the global scale, relations with our alumni can be strengthened and Harvard's international standing should be enhanced.

In closing, let me offer some personal thoughts about my approach to leadership. My management style is based on transparency and being straightforward in both conduct and deliberations. Over the years of my leadership positions, I discovered that honesty and trust offer the best path for achieving cooperation from colleagues and harvesting their energy to propel the better good of the community (rather than wasting it as heat in unnecessary friction). I never manipulate people but rather aim to excite them about our common goals. I owe my success to strong teamwork and cooperation from everyone who works with me. As I mentioned already, the key for success lies in the selection of excellent members for our team of staff, faculty and students.

If given the opportunity to serve as the leader of our exceptional university, I will do everything I can to ensure that each of its members is excited to participate in its inspiring mission of education and research.

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