



## HARVARD SINGAPORE FOUNDATION

### Letter from Drew Gilpin Faust, President of Harvard University

Wednesday, September 19, 2007

**Subject:** Letter to the Harvard Community

Dear Alumni and Friends,

I find something wonderfully energizing about September in Harvard Yard. Freshmen unpack their bags, decorate their walls with the Coop's finest Picassos and Monets, and set off on one of life's great adventures. Stereos blare through open windows, frisbees and footballs crisscross the Yard, and returning faculty and students catch up on summer doings. The air seems fresh and full of possibility.



Maybe I've felt this sensation more this September than in past years because I'm a recent arrival in the Yard myself, gradually getting my bearings, looking forward to the year before us. My summer in Cambridge has given me the opportunity to visit and talk with people from all across the University - to listen and learn, and to think together about plans and aspirations as we look ahead. I am deeply grateful for the generosity and warmth I have been shown by all in these first weeks of my presidency

Harvard is just one generation shy of its 400th birthday, but for all its history and all its extraordinary resources - academic, physical, and financial - what drives its progress and sustains its vitality is the collective effort of all of us - faculty, students, staff, alumni, and friends. No community I know holds greater potential to shape the world of ideas and contribute to improving the human condition. And one of my paramount hopes for the coming years is that, more and more, when all of us at Harvard think and talk about our endeavors, we will be describing not just an accumulation of discrete individual pursuits, but the efforts of people in different parts of the University working actively toward common ends. We not only share Harvard as a place to live and work, as a line on our return address; we share a stake in its overall directions and its determination to look forward always with thoughtful ambition, never with complacency.

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Knowing that our institutional capacity depends so much on the qualities and contributions of the people among us, I am especially pleased by the successful conclusion of a number of important dean searches. Mike Smith assumed office as Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences in mid-July. Jeff Flier became Dean of the Faculty of Medicine on September 1. Mohsen Mostafavi will join us as Dean of the Faculty of Design next January. In addition, Barbara Grosz has stepped forward to



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serve as Acting Dean of the Radcliffe Institute, and David Pilbeam, having admirably served as the FAS interim dean last spring, has graciously agreed to carry forward as Acting Dean of Harvard College. They all bring to their new roles an impressive record of accomplishment as teachers, scholars, and academic leaders. And they all share a commitment, with one another and with our other deans, not only to the success of their own faculties and schools, but to the future of Harvard as a whole.

I am also delighted that the distinguished historian Robert Darnton has joined us as the new Director of the University Library, and that Tamara Rogers will assume her duties as Vice President for Alumni Affairs and Development on October 1, as we begin to move toward a university-wide campaign. A search for Harvard's first Executive Vice President is under way. And we now confront the need to replace Mohamed El-Erian, the head of Harvard Management Company, who has decided for family reasons to return to southern California. James Rothenberg, the Treasurer of the University and chair of the HMC board, has begun to organize the search for Mohamed's successor.

As the new year begins, we can look forward to some noteworthy changes in our academic landscape. This month we launch our new School of Engineering and Applied Sciences - a recognition of the rising importance of engineering and technology in our academic universe, as well as their power to bridge different fields and to connect us with the larger world. Later in the fall we will open the New College Theater - an embodiment of our determination that the lively arts find an even livelier home at Harvard.

Within months, we hope to break ground on the first science complex in Allston - a milestone in our larger efforts to shape new spaces hospitable to interdisciplinary collaboration, and to extend our campus in ways that will brighten our academic future, benefit the surrounding community, and reinforce our commitment to sustainability. This complex will complement the impressive new buildings that have recently risen along Oxford Street in Cambridge - the Laboratory for Integrated Science and Engineering, now open for business, and the Northwest science building, expected to open in 2008.

Nearby, construction work has just begun on a historic transformation of the Law School campus, part of a broader project of adapting our programs of professional education to the needs and opportunities of changing times. Meanwhile, we will pursue the important work of designing an ambitious and long-overdue renovation of the Fogg Museum. We are committed not only to responsible stewardship of the invaluable collections we possess, but also to making the close-up study of works of art a more integral part of our educational programs.

These are but a handful of examples of initiatives now in progress - examples one could easily multiply looking across our schools. From engineering to theater, from interdisciplinary science to art to law, and in innumerable fields around and in between, we have opportunities not just to advance our efforts in discrete fields, but to work to become a university known more for bridges and less for walls.

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There is another event on the fall calendar, set for October 12, that the formal invitation characterizes as the installation of a new president of the University. I like to think, however, that the event is not about a person, or even an office, but about the larger community of learning. It gives us an occasion to reflect on higher education's highest aspirations, to remember what it is that draws us together in this extraordinary place, to challenge ourselves to build a future that both honors and transcends our past. For today, let me offer just a few observations on the new academic year in front of us - not a map, but a sketch, with more broad strokes and plenty of significant detail yet to come.

First, this will be a pivotal year in the continuing effort to enhance undergraduate education at Harvard. Last spring marked the adoption of a new curricular framework for general education, after years of important discussion and debate. Ahead lies the equally important - and no less challenging - work of designing an array of new courses and shaping the elements of the overall curriculum into a cohesive whole. As these efforts proceed, I hope we will bear in mind the question of how our undergraduate program can draw greater strength from the fact that Harvard *College* makes its home within Harvard *University*, with its matchless collection of schools, centers, libraries, laboratories, and museums. More generally, as we think about educational programs across the institution, and as we look forward to harmonizing the schools' academic calendars, I hope we will find more ways for students and faculty in one school to benefit from teaching and learning opportunities in others.

Second, this will be the first full year of work for the Harvard University Science and Engineering Committee - a new body bringing together the provost, key deans, and faculty leaders to help us consider our initiatives and investments in this domain in a more coordinated way. This effort is obviously vital in its own right, for the future of Harvard science - as is the launch of our first-ever cross-faculty academic department, the joint FAS-Medical School Department of Stem Cell and Regenerative Biology. More broadly, these developments underscore both the opportunity and the need to think in more integrated ways about our activities in other large domains that transcend individual schools - whether the social sciences, or the arts, or international studies. Each such domain poses its own challenges, both intellectual and practical, and will warrant distinctive approaches over time. And any such approaches will demand that we work to strengthen individual parts of the enterprise at the same time we ponder potentially productive ways to link them. The point for now is simply that we owe it to ourselves to think more consciously about where such linkages might benefit education and scholarship, and how our institutional structures and habits of mind can encourage rather than inhibit their pursuit.

Third, this year stands to be a critical one in our planning for Allston. As I noted, we aim to break ground on the initial set of buildings - the first science complex - that will inaugurate a decades-long extension of our campus. As we intensify our planning, it seems to me essential that we come to view Allston as a shared opportunity - an investment not merely in one school or another, in this program or that one, but in the common future of an institution whose vitality depends on new intellectual connections, new spaces in which to work and live, new ways of engaging each other and our neighbors. While we are deeply involved in discussions of plans for Harvard's presence in Allston, we must remember that these plans take root in aspirations for Harvard



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more generally. They must grow out of the needs and hopes we define for ourselves as schools and programs, faculty and students, teachers and learners - not just in our new precincts, but in our traditional ones. And we must explore as well the opportunities that Harvard's changing landscape offers to build strengthened relations with our neighbors both in Cambridge and Boston.

Finally, if Harvard is first of all defined not by buildings or endowments or traditions but by people, we have an overriding interest in attracting to our community the most talented people we can find - as students, as faculty, as staff. We have made encouraging strides in recent years in opening our doors more widely to people of different backgrounds, different experiences, and different economic means. We have learned, more and more, that our commitment to excellence depends on a commitment to inclusiveness. We have much more still to do - not least, in considering how our programs of financial aid, not just in the College but across the schools, can enable us to attract the very best students to Harvard, and allow them to pursue careers without the burden of excessive debt.

In the villanelle he wrote for Harvard's 350th anniversary, Seamus Heaney closed with an evocative couplet, well known to some of you, worth knowing by all:

A spirit moves, John Harvard walks the yard,  
The books stand open and the gates unbarred.

May that spirit welcome all of us into this new academic year.

Sincerely,

**Drew Gilpin Faust**

President of Harvard University  
Wednesday, September 19, 2007