

# THE FUTURE OF LEADERSHIP AT HARVARD:



## An Open Letter to the Harvard Community

### From the Harvard Union of Clerical & Technical Workers

June, 2006

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The first half of 2006 has seen the end of a pivotal era at Harvard, coinciding with the close of Larry Summers' tumultuous presidency. In the brief months since the president's resignation, it has become clear that the Harvard community is entering a period of change and reconsideration, with many hoping for a new spirit and refreshed atmosphere. In this letter, leaders of the Harvard Union of Clerical and Technical Workers offer brief comment on the current situation, and describe our hopes for the future of leadership at Harvard.

### **The Future is Wide Open**

There are many different opinions among loyal Harvard citizens about the meaning and lessons of the last few years. There are equally numerous aspirations and concerns about the University's future, as we enter an uncertain time with several key leadership roles vacant. In addition to the open position of University President, there are vacancies in the critical positions of permanent FAS Dean and Vice President for Finance, as well as several other Dean and Director roles.

In recent meetings across the University, HUCTW members and leaders have talked about qualities and skills we might hope for in our University's senior leaders. These include:

**Listening.** Like any organization, Harvard works best when many voices are heard, and when ideas from all quarters are considered with openness and empathy.

**Diplomacy.** The Harvard of the 21st Century is a large and complex organization. Its many energetic interests cannot help but collide with each other at times, and the politics are not always pretty. Careful, skillful diplomacy and accommodation are needed to maintain balance among competing groups and priorities. One union member half-joked that a Secretary-General of the United Nations might have the best resume to become Harvard President.

**Respect and community-building.** In addition to promoting a courageous academic agenda, our University leaders should be models of determined civility. The creation of a healthy community and a respectful environment should be an explicit priority. We hope for leaders who set a kind and thoughtful tone for the rigorous discourse which is our University's life blood.

### **A Push for Collaboration**

Already in the first formative weeks of the search for a new University President, an encouraging trend has emerged. From a number of directions, forces within the Harvard community are pressing for a more inclusive, more open selection process.

HUCTW members listened with optimism when the Harvard Corporation announced a presidential search process which includes advisory groups of faculty and students. Although

these groups may not play a pivotal decision-making role, the effort to include more perspectives and hear more voices is admirable. Union members were also impressed to hear leaders of Harvard's professional school student associations calling for their seats at the table.

A presidential search process which provides for input from faculty, undergraduates and graduate students will be more inclusive and more sensitive to the views of our whole community than any such process in the past. Of course, it is still not as inclusive as it might be. What about the voices of 10,000 Harvard staff members? We would urge the managers of the presidential search to consider creating a structure for staff input and advice to the search. As employees, we have a significant stake in these decisions, and it is important to understand that our involvement in the process would serve interests broader than our own.

Inclusive decision-making mechanisms have been used before at Harvard with great success. One of the first difficult policy issues faced by the Summers administration, for example, was to consider and implement the recommendations made by the Harvard Committee on Hiring and Contracting Policies, or "Katz Committee." In that case, a deep collaboration among Harvard faculty, students, administrators and unionized staff, appointed by former President Neil Rudenstine in the aftermath of the Living Wage Campaign sit-in of 2001, resulted in an intense and creative process which established progressive and pragmatic new wage and benefit policies for Harvard's service workers. Both the original issues (the ethics of outsourcing) and the successful endeavor to address them should serve as reminders that staff constitute one of the most enduring and involved presences at the University. Our collective experience and knowledge of the complex organism that is Harvard can only add to its stability and strength – qualities necessary in an institution striving not only for expansion but for real, productive growth.

### **Hope for the "New Era"**

HUCTW leaders see many reasons to be hopeful about the "new era" which is beginning at Harvard. In the next year, the University will select a new president, using an increasingly consultative decision-making process. In the same period of time, our union and Harvard will begin negotiating a new Agreement. Professor and former Harvard President Derek Bok has agreed to serve as Acting President during the search process. Bok is well-regarded and trusted among many faculty and staff, and HUCTW leaders look forward to working with him again.

As a Union currently representing nearly five thousand employees, our collective knowledge and expertise are considerable. Our 18-year history of collaborative and creative problem-solving at Harvard has demonstrated to our members and Harvard partners just how powerful and successful decision-making can be when it is based on the shared interests of many. In that spirit, we encourage the University to be as inclusive as possible in addressing the crucial decisions that now face us. If we as a community can find a way to combine the energy of our University's historic successes with the exciting developments and ideas of recent years, tempered by a new spirit of collaboration and civility, Harvard will make important strides toward a future that is truly worthy of its great past.