

September 17, 2018:

New Faculty Institute Welcome Remarks

JUDITH D. SINGER: Thank you all. I'm Judy Singer. I'm the senior vice provost for faculty development and diversity, and I am also a professor of statistics at the Graduate School of Education. And on behalf of all of Harvard, I would like to invite you to this new faculty institute.

This is the 11th year that we've been doing this, and it's a chance to bring together faculty from across the university to meet each other; to hear from colleagues who have, like you, once been new; and to hear, in today's case, from someone who's just as new as you, the 29th president of Harvard University, Lawrence S. Bacow.

I'm just going to say a few words, and then I'm going to turn the podium over to President Bacow. And then I'll come pop up and say a few more words. What I hope is that both today and also in the experiences that you've had over the last few weeks, you've gotten a chance to see what a terrific place Harvard is to be a faculty member.

We know that all of you had lots of options. Anybody we want to hire wants to be hired by a lot of other institutions as well, and we are so thrilled that you made the decision to join us here. You're going to have fabulous colleagues, fabulous students. You're going to discover that the Harvard name, for better or worse, opens doors. And it's also just a terrific place to do research.

But since President Bacow is with us, I'm going to yield the podium because he takes rank over me. And I think he needs no introduction. I think the one piece of introduction I would give you is that Harvard is not quite 400 years old, and he is the 29th president. So just wrap your head around that. You're going to live a long time.

[LAUGHTER]

LAWRENCE S. BACOW: From your lips to God's ears.

JUDITH D. SINGER: Exactly.

LAWRENCE S. BACOW: And let's hope she's listening.

JUDITH D. SINGER: OK.

[LAUGHTER]

LAWRENCE S. BACOW: Well, as Judy said, I am also a new faculty member. My faculty appointment was processed at exactly the same time all of yours were. So I would like to say I'm delighted to be a member of your class, and I look forward to getting to know many of you in a variety of different kinds of capacities.

As I was saying to Judy and your panelists up here when we were just talking in advance, this sort of brought me back in time to when I was welcomed as a very, very junior faculty member-- it's hard to admit this-- 41 years ago at MIT. I spent the bulk of my career at MIT.

And Judy asked me, so what advice did they give you back then. And I actually do remember. I said, god, I can't remember. Then I remembered the advice I was given back then. So I will share that advice with you right now.

And this is more applicable to those of you who are joining us as your first faculty appointment as opposed to those of you who are lateral moves and have been faculty members elsewhere and are coming here, in some cases, as full professors. I was advised to remember that in a great university, best idea wins.

It does not make any difference what your rank is, where you came from before. Treat your faculty colleagues and others exactly like that. If you disagree with them, disagree with them. Stand up for your own ideas, your own scholarship, and you will do well. It actually was great,

great advice. I think it's actually great advice not just for faculty members. I think it's great advice for students and for others also.

Just a few weeks ago, I welcomed entering first-year students. And before that, I spoke to first-year faculty advisors. And when I spoke to them, I made a point of saying if you're going to be a good faculty advisor, it's really important to try and remember what it was like when you were a student, and you got sort of the envelope saying you've now been accepted to blank, or the first time you were appointed here at Harvard.

Students at Harvard talk about dropping the H bomb, that the fact that we all work here, study here-- whatever-- can be intimidating for others. But hopefully, it will certainly not be for our students, nor will it be for you. The miracle of Harvard is that we combine-- we take great students and combine them with great faculty under temperature and pressure, and really interesting catalytic reactions occur. And the peer effects here are really quite extraordinary, and they make, I think, everybody better.

That said, everybody at one time or another can find themselves intimidated by the place. It's true of new students. It's true of new faculty. It's true of new staff. It's true of new presidents.

[LAUGHTER]

So my advice to you is to relax and try and exploit the place in every possible way. Everybody who works here, and I do mean everybody, is invested in your success. And people are going to do whatever they can to try and ensure that you can do work here. You can do scholarship here that you can do perhaps no other place. And that is, I think-- our collective goal is to surround you with great students; great colleagues; great staff; hopefully, great facilities and resources.

The resources, I know, will never be enough because faculty have an insatiable appetite for resources. That's how it should be. But we are here to try and ensure that you can do truly, truly great things.

So let me just stop there. By the way, I am not President Bacow. I'm Larry. That's what everybody calls me. So when you see me around, please stop and say, hello, Larry. And don't hesitate to stop me and tell me how things are going for you.

JUDITH D. SINGER: Thanks, Larry, very much. I'm just going to say a few words about the university, the sort of payback on Phil's question. There are some things that you're going to learn about Harvard in your years here that you see it from the perspective of being in your individual school or your individual department, but there's a big superstructure. And I'm not talking about it in lumbering administration. I'm talking about just a big superstructure for the entire university.

Harvard is a huge place. Among our Ivy League, Ivy Plus peers, we're larger than pretty much everyone. And so it means that you have to work harder to break through those kinds of boundaries. There are about 1,500 ladder faculty across the university. And then we have our Harvard-affiliated hospitals. There are 18 Harvard-affiliated hospitals, and they have another 11,000 faculty.

So if you start to wrap your head around the sheer magnitude of it, there's just a lot of opportunity to meet people. And there are a lot of people who are doing interesting work that we'd like you to be able to partake of.

I'd also say that Harvard is increasingly diverse. And if you take a look at this room, this is not your father's Harvard. When I started on the faculty in 1984, I can tell you I was one of the few women on the faculty at the university. That is just not the case anymore.

Overall at the university, we're now-- 30% of the ladder faculty are female, 24% are minorities. And the entering class-- you in this room-- are particularly diverse-- 37% female, 38% minority.

Another feature of Harvard right now, and this is more directed towards the newly tenured faculty who are here-- you're all coming from the outside, but Harvard has moved to a tenure

track. And so increasingly, your tenured colleagues, especially your earlier career tenured colleagues, will have come up from within.

And this is a huge sea change in terms of the sense of the university and sense of investing in people. We are really invested in every single faculty member that comes here who are invested in their success.

This whole question of one Harvard and the tub system-- you're in a changing era. So Drew used the phrase "one Harvard." I think Larry is continuing to adopt it. And the idea is that you should be building on the connections that exist across the university. And in fact, the panelists we have here are a really good illustration of those kinds of connections.

The decentralization was cited as one of Harvard's successes in an era before technology and before we were all connected to each other. This is a very different kind of era. And we are actually working on technological tools to help you meet other faculty with common interests across the university.

Stay tuned to that. We're working on developing some faculty dashboards that can help you meet other people from across the university. In the meantime, I am the human faculty finder. So if you are intere-- they're all nodding because they know I'm the human faculty finder. We are very interested in faculty development and diversity in facilitating these connections.

So just drop us a line, and we are happy to hook you up. I send emails to people all the time, electronically introducing them to each other.

And the whole rationale for today is to bring people together from across the university and at different career stages. And we're going to hear from our colleagues from also across Harvard at different career stages about their experiences and advice to new faculty.