

VIA FACSIMILE - Fax: (617) 495-8550

January 27, 2005

President Lawrence H. Summers
Office of the President
Harvard University
Massachusetts Hall
Cambridge, MA 02138

Dear President Summers:

We, the undersigned, are organizations that advocate for gender equity and equal opportunity in education and, in particular, for full and effective enforcement of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 – the landmark federal law that bars sex discrimination in all aspects of education. We are writing both to respond to your comments, as widely reported in the media, about the under-representation of women in math and science and to call upon you to take the lead in addressing the persistent barriers that limit opportunities for women in these disciplines.

Your suggestion, as reported by the press, that innate differences between men and women might in some measure explain women's under-representation in math and science ignores several critical points. First, as numerous researchers have recognized, physiological differences between the genders have not been found to translate into differences in males' and females' abilities to pursue careers in math or science generally – much less into differences in the ability of any individual man or woman to succeed in these disciplines. *See, e.g.,* Natalie Angier & Kenneth Chang, "Gray Matter and the Sexes: Still a Scientific Gray Area," *The New York Times*, January 24, 2005. The substantial research already done in this area thus indicates that there is no evidentiary support for the proposition that physiological differences can explain the disparities between the genders that persist in math and science.

Second, an assertion about "innate" differences between men and women ignores the fact that both genders' mental and intellectual abilities and interests have been shaped by societal expectations about those differences, resulting in disparities in the level of encouragement and opportunities to which each gender has been given access. Throughout our nation's history, women's opportunities have been constrained based on notions of "innate" differences – for example that their hormones make them incapable of rational decision-making, that they are unable to work while they are pregnant, or that they lack the aggressiveness necessary to succeed in the business world. While these

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Harvard University
Cambridge, MA 02138
January 27, 2005

types of insidious stereotypes have been resoundingly rejected over time, they have nevertheless resulted in significant barriers to women's achievement – barriers that have themselves had enduring adverse and unfair impact on women's opportunities to develop their talents and abilities. As a result, attempts to characterize women's abilities as "innate" disregard the very real – and still damaging – effect of societal constraints on those very abilities.

The barriers that women have confronted are both explicit and subtle, and have included quotas on women's admission to institutions of higher education, dictates on the proper length of maternity leaves, and workplace decision-making based on societal views about "lady-like" behavior. While some of the most overt exclusionary practices have been abolished in the last several decades, discrimination remains an all-too-pervasive part of women's experiences to this day, especially in disciplines from which women have been traditionally excluded. For example, a study of faculty at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1999 found that tenured women there faced "patterns of difference," including lower salaries than their male peers, unequal access to resources, and exclusion from leadership positions at the university. A similar study done in 2003 at Princeton University revealed that, despite some gains in hiring and promotion, women faculty in the sciences continued to be under-represented in leadership positions, to wait longer for promotion from associate to full professor, and to report having fewer mentors than their male colleagues. And just last month, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* published a front page article ("Where the Elite Teach, It's Still a Man's World," Dec. 3, 2004), discussing the myriad ways in which women continue to be disadvantaged in seeking and advancing in employment at major research universities and the most prestigious colleges. Similar barriers affect female students in the sciences.

Recent data confirm, moreover, that in numerous fields there are more qualified women in the pipeline than are being hired for academic positions. A report released just one year ago shows, for example, that while women received close to 45% of the doctorate degrees in the biological sciences between 1993 and 2002, they accounted for only about 30% of the assistant professors in the field in 2002. Dr. Donna J. Nelson, *A National Analysis of Diversity in Science and Engineering Faculties at Research Universities* (January, 2005), available at <http://cheminfo.chem.ou.edu/~djn/diversity/briefings/Diversity%20Report%20Final.pdf>. And the percentage of women among those receiving undergraduate degrees in computer and information sciences has actually been falling, from 37% in 1984 to 28% in 2001. A decline of this sort surely cannot be attributed to a change in women's "innate" abilities.

To allow women to pursue their interests and abilities, therefore, it is essential to eliminate artificial barriers to their achievement. You have stated that you are committed to the advancement of women in science and that "all of us have a crucial stake in accelerating progress toward that end." Your recent announcement, as reported in the press, that you will create task forces to examine the University's hiring and cultivation

President Lawrence H. Summers
Harvard University
Cambridge, MA 02138
January 27, 2005

of female faculty members and a new initiative to enhance recruitment of women represents an important first step in this endeavor. Based on the widespread attention to the issue that your original presentation and follow-up comments have generated, this is an opportune time for you and the Harvard community to address publicly and concretely the barriers that women face.

In addition to the plans you have already announced, we call on you to publicly commit to making the elimination of barriers to, and the advancement of women in, math and the sciences a major priority of your tenure at the University. To ensure that that commitment is met, we further call on you to appoint senior-level university officials who are charged with meeting specific objectives to advance women in math and the sciences, who will report to you regularly and directly, and who will be held accountable for fulfillment of these responsibilities. To be effective, moreover, any committees or task forces you establish must receive full funding, be staffed with sufficient personnel to adequately fulfill their mission, and be directed to undertake investigations and make and implement recommendations for changes to the University's policies within specific time frames.

Among other things, you and your designees should take the following basic steps toward improving opportunities for women in math and the sciences:

- Commit to, and aggressively pursue and ensure, full compliance with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and Executive Order 11246 by every college and department of the University, including, but not restricted to, the math and sciences departments;
- Engage in a formal review of, and preparation of a public report on, the practices of each of the University's math and science departments to evaluate whether there are gender-based barriers to women's advancement within the student body and the faculty. Such a review should include, at a minimum, a climate analysis by women who have studied at the University as undergraduate or graduate students and analysis of the availability of mentoring relationships; the allocation of lab space and research assistance; the assignment of graduate students; the opportunity to edit prestigious professional journals; the receipt of funding for research projects; and the like;
- Publicly disseminate comprehensive data, by gender by race and ethnicity, on the employment of the University's faculty, including with regard to recruitment, hiring, promotion, tenure decisions, appointments to committees and departmental positions, research grants, retention, and salary, with a commitment to update the data on an annual basis;

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Harvard University
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January 27, 2005

- Publicly disseminate comprehensive data, by gender by race and ethnicity, on the admission, financial support, and graduation rates of undergraduate and graduate students, with a commitment to update the data on an annual basis;
- Make and implement firm and public commitments to specific proactive measures to recruit and retain women in math, science and engineering, including targeted outreach and recruitment; mentoring programs; and adoption of policies that enable faculty and students to combine work and family and other personal responsibilities;
- Take the lead in initiating new, or continuing, structured, public and ongoing dialogues with university presidents at other major research universities (such as those convened by then-MIT President Charles Vest) to identify and implement steps to increase the recruitment, advancement and retention of women, at both the student and the faculty levels, especially in fields in which they have not been well-represented.

We look forward to your response to this letter, and to a continuing discussion of these important issues, to ensure that women and men are able to attain their individual professional and academic potential without artificial constraints based on gender.

Sincerely,

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On Behalf Of:

American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee
American Association of University Women
American Civil Liberties Union Women's Rights Project
Association for Gender Equity Leadership in Education
Association for Women in Science*
Business and Professional Women/USA*
Dads and Daughters

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Feminist Majority Foundation
Justice and Witness Ministries, United Church of Christ
Legal Momentum (the new name of NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund)
Myra Sadker Advocates for Gender Equity
National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity
National Association of Collegiate Women Athletics Administrators
National Organization for Women
National Partnership for Women and Families
National Women's Law Center
United States Student Association
Wider Opportunities for Women
Women's Prerogative
Women's Sports Foundation
YWCA USA

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