

NOW Calls for Resignation of Harvard University's President

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The National Organization for Women calls for the resignation of Harvard University President Lawrence Summers, who has failed to lead the prominent (and previously all-male) university toward true inclusion of women. His recent comments generated a firestorm of response from Harvard/Radcliffe women who were outraged that he would embarrass Harvard with such a public demonstration of sexism and ignorance.

"Summers' suggestion that women are inferior to men in their ability to excel at math and science is more than an example of personal sexism, it is a clue to why women have not been more fully accepted and integrated into the tenured faculty at Harvard since he has been president," said NOW President Kim Gandy. According to reports, the number of female faculty receiving tenure has declined over the past four years — down to just four of the last 32 tenure offers in the school's Faculty of Arts and Sciences.

"Harvard University holds itself out as the pinnacle of higher education in this country," said Gandy. "Such an esteemed institution should set a standard for other colleges and universities — a standard that Lawrence Summers appears unable to maintain."

Nearly a week after his comments — made at a National Bureau of Economic Research conference on women and people of color in science and engineering — Summers finally issued a carefully-worded apology, in which he regretted the impact of his statements. However, the damage will persist, as will the questions about his true commitment to inclusion, as long as he remains a leader in higher education.

"The women of Harvard — professors, students and alums — merit more than a belated and defensive 'I'm sorry,'" said Gandy. "How can they trust that Summers is committed to equality for women when he doesn't seem to believe that discrimination exists?"

In Summers' Jan. 14 remarks, he proposed that innate genetic differences between the sexes may be one explanation for why fewer women succeed in math and science careers. NOW applauds the women who challenged his comments at the conference and afterward. We thank the hundreds (if not thousands) of women who have written to newspapers and to Summers directly to set him straight about the challenges that face women in still-non-traditional fields.

"The notion that women are innately inferior to men is simply archaic," said Gandy. "For decades, women have been making dramatic advances in science and technology fields while negotiating a minefield of gender stereotypes and obstacles created by ignorance. It has been a rocky road, but women have risen to the challenge. It's time to remove the barriers, and one of them is Lawrence Summers."

NOW will be watching Harvard University. Will Harvard encourage women as students in the "hard" sciences, promote more women in faculty positions, and step up the recruitment of women for teaching positions in math and science departments? Or will Harvard be thwarted in achieving these goals with Summers at the helm?

"Apologies are not enough," said Gandy. "Summers must go, and Harvard must start with a clean slate."

Read a **[statement](#)** by Dr. Donna J. Nelson, an associate professor of chemistry and biochemistry at the University of Oklahoma and a recipient of NOW's 2004 Woman of Courage Award.

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