BACKGROUND REGARDING PRESIDENTIAL SEARCH PROCESS

The selection of Lawrence S. Bacow as the 29th president of Harvard University marks the culmination of an intensive and wide-ranging search launched in July 2017, shortly after Drew Gilpin Faust announced her plans to step down from the presidency at the end of June 2018.

In accordance with the University charter of 1650, ratified by the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780, a new president is elected by the Harvard Corporation (formally known as the President and Fellows of Harvard College), with the counsel and consent of the University’s Board of Overseers. The Board of Overseers consists of thirty members who are elected by holders of Harvard degrees, with the president and treasurer of the University as ex officio members.

As in Harvard’s two most recent presidential searches, a search committee was formed comprising the members of the Corporation other than the president (who excused herself from the search and election process, consistent with past practice), together with three members of the Board of Overseers.

The committee initiated the search with an email sent in July 2017 to more than 375,000 individuals – including all Harvard faculty, students, staff, and alumni and selected leaders in higher education and research, government, and the nonprofit sector. The email sought advice on the opportunities and challenges facing higher education and Harvard, as well as the most important qualities to seek in a new president; it also invited nominations of individuals warranting consideration.

Starting in July 2017, the committee undertook an extensive process of interviews and meetings with individuals and groups throughout the Harvard community, in the wider world of universities and colleges, and beyond. Members of the committee consulted individually with more than 250 people inside and outside Harvard. In addition, committee members met with dozens of groups of faculty, alumni, and others across the Harvard schools.

Essential to the process were the efforts of three advisory committees, consisting of faculty, students, and staff. The 13-member faculty advisory committee was chaired by Robin Kelsey, the Shirley Carter Burden Professor of Photography and Dean of Arts and Humanities in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, and included members from each of the University’s faculties. The 18-member student advisory group was chaired by Jyoti Jasrasaria, a third-year Harvard Law School student and Harvard College graduate, and included members from each of Harvard’s degree-granting schools. The staff advisory committee – a new feature of the process, compared to prior presidential searches – was chaired by Katie Lapp, the University’s executive vice president, and included members from different schools and central administration departments. Throughout the fall term, each of the committees took active part in extending the process of outreach to the wider University community, in conducting meetings among themselves and soliciting input from others, and in providing valuable counsel to the search committee on the diverse perspectives and concerns of the University’s core campus constituencies.

In addition to the many outreach sessions undertaken by members of the three advisory
committees, members of the search committee also gathered advice through meetings with faculty leadership groups in each of Harvard’s faculties, with university-wide and school-based groups of leading alumni, with University Professors, and with tenure-track faculty, among others.

The search committee received more than 1,800 emails and letters regarding the search, and was presented with more than 700 nominees for consideration. The committee met 16 times, often for three to four hours, before concluding its work. Late in the search, the full committee or subgroups of the committee met at length with several of the leading nominees, and learned more about them through phone calls and other contacts with people familiar with their work.

The search committee, including its Overseer members, met with the full Board of Overseers at the Board’s regular meetings during the search to brief the Overseers on the progress of the search and to invite their continuing counsel. Finally, on February 11, 2018, at a meeting of the governing boards in Cambridge, the Corporation elected Lawrence S. Bacow as the University’s next president, effective July 1, 2018, and the Board of Overseers voted its consent.

At the outset of the search, as noted above, the search committee comprised all members of the Corporation other than President Drew Faust, in addition to three members of the Board of Overseers. In mid-December, after numerous people consulted about the search urged that he be considered as a candidate, Lawrence Bacow agreed to such consideration and withdrew from the search committee.

From that point forward, the members of the presidential search committee included:

William F. Lee (chair), A.B. '72, Senior Fellow of Harvard College, partner and former co-managing partner, Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr LLP;

Scott A. Abell, A.B. '72, Harvard Overseer, retired chair and CEO, Abell & Associates, Inc.;

James W. Breyer, M.B.A. '87, Fellow of Harvard College, founder and CEO, Breyer Capital;

Susan L. Carney, A.B. '73, J.D. '77, Harvard Overseer, Judge, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit;

Kenneth I. Chenault, J.D. '76, Fellow of Harvard College, former chairman and CEO, American Express Co., chairman and managing director, General Catalyst Partners;

Paul J. Finnegan, A.B. ’75, M.B.A. ’82, Treasurer of Harvard College, co-CEO, Madison Dearborn Partners;

Susan L. Graham, A.B. '64, Fellow of Harvard College, Pehong Chen Distinguished Professor of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science Emerita, University of California, Berkeley;


Tracy P. Palandjian, A.B. ’93, M.B.A. ’97, Harvard Overseer, co-founder and CEO, Social Finance Inc.;

David M. Rubenstein, Fellow of Harvard College, co-founder and co-executive chairman, The Carlyle Group;

Shirley M. Tilghman, LL.D. ’04 (hon.), Fellow of Harvard College, president emerita and professor of molecular biology and public affairs, Princeton University;

Theodore V. Wells, Jr., J.D. ’76, M.B.A. ’76, Fellow of Harvard College, partner, Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP.

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