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### **Harvard President Faust on federal college ratings, campus sexual assault and more**



Harvard University President Drew Gilpin Faust (The Washington Post)

By Nick Anderson December 15, 2014 Follow @wpnick

Any day now, the federal government is expected to reveal its first comprehensive plan for rating colleges on measures of value and access. You might think that Harvard University, perennially ranked at or near the top in higher education, would be unconcerned.

You would be wrong.

“I think it raises the issue of what do you rate them for?” Harvard President Drew Gilpin Faust told The Washington Post. “It goes back to what is college worth. What are you going to say? Is it all going to be about how much more money an individual makes with a college degree?”

Whatever formula the Education Department devises for ratings, Faust said, should take into account numerous factors. For example: How many graduates go into public service?

“Give a multifaceted, nuanced picture of what colleges do,” Faust said. “Certainly the dropout rate . . . would be something worth understanding about a college. But I think these should be very complex portraits of institutions. And not reduce an institution to a simple metric.”

The federal rating initiative, which President Obama announced in August 2013, was one of several topics Faust discussed in a recent visit to The Post’s newsroom.

Harvard’s 28th president, in office since 2007, has sought this fall to kindle a conversation about what she calls “the case for college.” In a speech in Dallas in October, Faust urged high school students to keep in mind the many reasons — not just economic ones — for going to college.

“There’s a lot of noise in the press and online about college not being worth it — being too expensive, unnecessary, just go start your startup, just go be an entrepreneur,” Faust said. Worried that this view is getting traction, Faust said she wants to provide a counter-argument.

She is well aware that for many Americans going to college is about getting the right credential to launch their careers.

“Which is of course important,” Faust said. “Economic growth is important. People’s ability to support their families and lead lives that are not dogged by financial uncertainty and stress — that is important. But I think we also need to understand that college is about much more than that.” Meeting new people, for instance, and new worlds of thought. Finding new goals. Discovering the value of deliberation.

Faust said the economic rationale sometimes gets too much attention on her own campus in Cambridge, Mass. “It’s true even of our students, who come now very anxious about what job they’re going to have, how their freshman choice of courses is going to relate to their employability,” she said. “I worry they’re going to waste Harvard if that’s the only attitude and approach they have to their education.”

To some, it may seem incongruous for the leader of one of the world’s most elite and exclusive universities to be spearheading an effort to get more people to go to college. Harvard, with about 6,700 undergraduates in its college, turned down 94 percent of those who applied to enter this year.

“My case is not that everybody should come to Harvard or send an application to Harvard,” Faust said.

“My case is that we have in the United States one of the most extraordinary assets in the world, which is our higher education system and its diversity. . . . So students can look for a lot of different aspects of education as they choose where they might want to go and what they might want to do.”

This year Stanford and Yale, two other ultra-selective private universities, said they plan to expand their entering classes. Faust said she is not considering expansion “at this particular time” because Harvard is in the midst of efforts to improve its undergraduate experience. “Not closing the subject at all,” she said. “We’ll have that discussion when we move a little more into this project.”

Faust also pointed to Harvard’s collaboration with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on free online education, through a Web site called edX, as evidence of commitment to educational access.

On campus sexual assault, an issue across the country, Harvard this year announced measures meant to get tough on the problem, including a new central office to investigate complaints. Harvard’s law school and college are both subject of federal investigations into their handling of sexual violence reports. More than 80 schools elsewhere are also under investigation.

Asked whether colleges have been slow to address the issue, Faust said, “We’ve been responding in ways that we’ve now accelerated. I think the discussion of the past year has shone a light on the level of concern and the widespread nature of these issues, and I think we’ve responded and been very committed to making sure that our campus is a safe place and that everybody on our campus feels able to take full advantage of the opportunities on the campus without fear of physical harm. Sexual assault has no place in a university, and we need to do everything possible to make that a reality.”

Several Harvard law professors have criticized the university’s new policy as unfair to those accused of sexual assault.

“We think our policy is a good one,” Faust responded, “and we think it will be a balanced one. The law faculty is raising issues of due process that arise from a sense that adversarial adjudication is the essence of due process. And I think they’re working through some of those issues.” Faust said the university will monitor cases closely to learn whether there are any worrisome patterns.

“That will help us as we move forward,” she said, “to see are there adjustments, are there things we’ve learned that help us understand better how to maintain this balance of fairness?”

Asked about Washington's role on sexual violence issues, Faust said, "The federal government's spotlight on this has certainly intensified all of our attention to the issue in ways that are important for the concerns and safety of our students." She declined comment on the federal investigations of Harvard.

On affirmative action, Harvard was named last month as a defendant in a lawsuit that alleges it discriminates against Asian Americans in admissions. Asked to respond, Faust said Harvard has been a leader for decades in supporting diversity through "holistic" review of applications, with race considered as one factor among many.

"We believe very firmly in that and think that this leads to a much more rich community," she said. "Our students learn as much from each other and the different perspectives that the variety of students who come to Harvard bring as they do from anything they learn from books or computers or courses or labs."

Faust, 67, was born in New York and grew up in Clarke County in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. A Civil War historian, she said she has been thinking about civil rights since she was a child. At age 9, she wrote a letter to President Dwight D. Eisenhower to voice her opposition to racial segregation of schools. At age 18, she marched with civil rights demonstrators in Selma, Ala.

Now, with the nation observing the sesquicentennial of the Civil War, Faust said she worries about what is being forgotten, especially the sacrifices made in the long struggle for civil rights. "We should not take them for granted," she said. "We should defend them. And we should recognize that we are not in a post-racial era. And that's part of our heritage."



Nick Anderson covers higher education for The Washington Post. He has been a writer and editor at The Post since 2005.