

# Summers' remarks on women draw fire

By Marcella Bombardieri, Globe Staff | January 17, 2005

**CAMBRIDGE -- The president of Harvard University, Lawrence H. Summers, sparked an uproar at an academic conference Friday when he said that innate differences between men and women might be one reason fewer women succeed in science and math careers. Summers also questioned how much of a role discrimination plays in the dearth of female professors in science and engineering at elite universities.**

Nancy Hopkins, a biologist at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, walked out on Summers' talk, saying later that if she hadn't left, "I would've either blacked out or thrown up." Five other participants reached by the Globe, including Denise D. Denton, chancellor designate of the University of California, Santa Cruz, also said they were deeply offended, while four other attendees said they were not.

Summers said he was only putting forward hypotheses based on the scholarly work assembled for the conference, not expressing his own judgments -- in fact, he said, more research needs to be done on these issues. The organizer of the conference at the National Bureau of Economic Research said Summers was asked to be provocative, and that he was invited as a top economist, not as a Harvard official.

However, the problem of women in academia is one that Summers is confronting in his role as university president. The percentage of tenured job offers made to women by the university's Faculty of Arts and Sciences has dropped dramatically since Summers took office, prompting vigorous complaints from many of Harvard's senior female professors.

Summers has called last year's results, when only four of 32 tenured job offers went to women, unacceptable and promised to work on the problem. However, some Harvard professors have questioned his commitment to the issue.

The setting was a two-day conference at the economic research bureau, a group in Cambridge whose members include economists from all over the country. The conference, on women and minorities in the science and engineering workforce, was a private, invitation-only event, with about 50 attendees.

Summers spoke during a working lunch. He declined to provide a tape or transcript of his remarks, but the description he gave in an interview was generally in keeping with what 10 participants recalled. He said he was synthesizing the scholarship that the organizers had asked him to discuss, and that in his talk he repeated several times: "I'm going to provoke you."

He offered three possible explanations, in declining order of importance, for the small number of women in high-level positions in science and engineering. The first was the reluctance or inability of women who have children to work 80-hour weeks.

The second point was that fewer girls than boys have top scores on science and math tests in late high school years. "I said no one really understands why this is, and it's an area of ferment in social science," Summers said in an interview Saturday. "Research in behavioral genetics is showing that things people previously attributed to socialization weren't due to socialization after all.

This was the point that most angered some of the listeners, several of whom said Summers said that women do not have the same "innate ability" or "natural ability" as men in some fields.

Asked about this, Summers said, "It's possible I made some reference to innate differences. . . I did say that you have to be careful in attributing things to

## Summers Reason

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questions are dealt with regarding the rule of law and criminal law defenses and the concept of rights and the terminology of rights are analyzed Much of Golding s work is critical historical as well as constructive This volume will prove an informative and useful collection for scholars and students of the philosophy of law

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