

“The essence of a university is that it is uniquely accountable to the past and to the future — not simply or even primarily to the present,” said Dr. Faust, 60, a Civil War historian and the former head of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at the university.

“A university is not about results in the next quarter,” Dr. Faust said. “It is not even about who a student has become by graduation. It is about learning that molds a lifetime, learning that transmits the heritage of millennia; learning that shapes the future.”

In clear opposition to pressure from the federal government for universities to prove they are accountable by quantifying how well they teach, she called on higher education institutions themselves “to seize the initiative in defining what we are accountable for.”

In an interview before the inauguration ceremony, Dr. Faust faulted a federal Commission on the future of Higher Education empanelled by the Bush administration for its focus on training a competitive work force for the global economy. While higher education makes “a fundamental contribution to training a work force,” she said, it should strive to be far more than that.

She paraphrased W. E. B. DuBois: “Education is not to make men carpenters so much as to make carpenters men.”

The commission, which was put in place by Margaret Spellings, the education secretary, in its final report last year called for public universities to measure learning with standardized tests, for federal monitoring of college quality and for sweeping changes in financial aid.

Dr. Faust’s speech offered a ringing defense of the traditional role of universities as “stewards of living tradition,” as places for “philosophers as well as scientists,” where learning and knowledge are pursued in part “because they define what has over centuries made us human, not because they can enhance our global competitiveness.”

Dr. Faust’s ascension to the presidency of the nation’s oldest university came more than a year after [Lawrence H. Summers](#), a former treasury secretary, stepped down after a five-year tenure that drew widespread faculty discontent. He set off a storm by suggesting that a lack of intrinsic aptitude could help explain why fewer women than men reach the top ranks of science and math in universities. Derek Bok, a former Harvard president, served as an interim replacement.

Dr. Faust had Dr. Summers, Dr. Bok and another former Harvard president, Neil Rudenstine, sitting nearby on stage on Friday, and at one point she and Dr. Summers embraced. In the interview she said that the [University of California](#) had erred by withdrawing a speaking invitation to him after a faculty petition.

With her two-day inauguration festivities that included African dancers; a reading by [Toni Morrison](#); and speeches by the historian John Hope Franklin and Deval Patrick, a Harvard graduate who is the first black governor of Massachusetts, Dr. Faust also signaled that universities like Harvard had to diversify their ranks.

“Those who long for a lost golden age of higher education should think about the very limited population that alleged utopia actually served,” she said. “College used to be a restricted to a tiny elite; now it serves the many, not just the few.”

She noted that American colleges had served as “both the emblem and the engine of the expansion of citizenship, equality and opportunity — to blacks, women, Jews, immigrants, and others who would have been subjected to quotas or excluded altogether in an earlier era.”

She added: “My presence here today — and indeed that of many others on this platform — would have been unimaginable even a few short years ago.”

She did not use the speech to lay out specific plans about what she hopes to accomplish in the months ahead, but instead set out the values and themes that she said she hoped would define her tenure. She did however affirm Harvard's commitment to making its education "available and affordable." Dr. Summers made it possible for students from families with incomes of less than \$60,000 a year to attend Harvard without incurring debt.

She talked about the importance of Harvard being at the forefront of scientific research, and of providing the resources for a new science complex that will include [stem cell](#) research. At the same time, she also emphasized the traditional humanistic values of the university.

"It is urgent," she said, "that we pose the questions of ethics and meaning that will enable us to confront the human, the social and the moral significance of our changing relationship with the natural world."