A RESPONSE to Rudenstine’s “Facts and Fallacies About Employment at Harvard”

Since April 27, the Office of the President of Harvard University has circulated documents, through the Harvard University Gazette and a University-wide mass e-mail, purporting to refute the Living Wage Campaign’s claims. Their claims deceptively narrow definitions and trivialize the problem of ‘poverty wages’ at Harvard. The administration’s own statistics reveal that at any given time, at least 1,179 Harvard workers earn less than $10.25 per hour and that many continue to lack basic benefits such as health insurance. Moreover, Rudenstine’s statement supplied no reason why the Harvard administration should not provide a living wage to its workers without one — whether 400 or 2,000.

CLAIM.

■ 403 of Harvard’s 13,500 regular employees earn less than $10.25 an hour in wages.

FACT. While this statement is technically correct, far more than 403 workers on the Harvard campus earn less than a living wage. Data published in the University’s own Ad-Hoc Committee on Employment Policies indicates there are at least 1,179 such workers. In defining “regular employees,” the administration excludes part-time Harvard employees, on-campus employees of contractors, and its casual workforce.

Many of the subcontracted positions now receiving the lowest wages had, until recently, been filled with unionized, directly-hired workers. As the University has outsourced an increasing number of its services, however, these workers have been replaced by non-unionized workers, and wages have plummeted. Over the past two years, for example, the university has replaced its unionized guards, who used to make a living wage, with non-unionized guards from a subcontracting firm (SSI) who make less than a living wage. Because of this policy, Harvard directly employs 18 guards when it used to employ over 120.

 CLAIM.

The minimum starting salary of a residential dining service worker employed by Harvard is currently $10.85 per hour and after 2 years of service the per-hour rate is $12.35.

No full-time employee at Harvard earns less than $10.25 an hour in total compensation.

FACT. The minimum starting wage for a non-residential dining service worker (at the Greenhouse, Loker, etc.) employed by Harvard is $8.05 per hour. The minimum starting wage for a subcontracted non-residential dining service worker at Harvard is currently as little as $7.00 per hour (Law School, Kennedy School, etc.). People working in this job earned substantially higher wages under direct Harvard employment prior to outsourcing by the University.

At least 342 full-time employees at Harvard earn wages below $10.25/hr. and many employees at Harvard lack basic benefits such as health insurance. “Total compensation” includes cash value of these benefits.

FACT. While extension of health insurance deserves applause, the move also risks doing more harm than good to employees. For instance, the guidelines reduce the hourly requirements to 16 hours a week. To avoid the extra costs involved in the provision of such benefits, Harvard or its contractors often reduce employees’ hours, rendering them ineligible. When the benefits cut-off was 20 hours a week, janitors at the Divinity School were allowed to work no more than 19. The Living Wage Campaign suggested independent monitoring to protect workers against such cutbacks; Harvard refused.

FACT. Harvard’s education and training program, the Harvard Bridge to Learning and Literacy, is one of the most innovative and generous employer-based education programs in the nation.

FACT. President Rudenstine and Provost Fineberg have open office hours on a regular basis in which they meet with any student wishing to consult them on any subject. They have met repeatedly with student advocates of the Living Wage during office hours, during visits to Houses, and at meetings specifically scheduled to issues related to employment practices at Harvard.

FACT. The Living Wage Campaign fully endorses the Harvard Bridge to Learning and Literacy program. However, it is no substitute for the implementation of a living wage for employees at Harvard.

FACT. As recently as one week prior to the sit-in, during President Rudenstine’s last office hours, he informed members of the PSLM that the living wage issue would not be reopened.

FACT. The University has established guidelines governing contracting with outside companies for service work for ongoing service to the Harvard campus of more than $50,000 per year and for periods of nine months or more. They specify that companies with contracts involving in the provision of such benefits, Harvard or its contractors often reduce employees’ hours, rendering them ineligible. When the benefits cut-off was 20 hours a week, janitors at the Divinity School were allowed to work no more than 19. The Living Wage Campaign suggested independent monitoring to protect workers against such cutbacks; Harvard refused.

FACT. Harvard is spending inordinate amounts on outsourcing and is a subcontractor at the expense of its own employees. Between fiscal years 1996-97 and 1998-99, Harvard subcontracted 22.1% of services, or $117,411,697. For fiscal years 1997-98 and 1998-99, subcontracting was 25.6% of services, or $180,751,052.

FACT. Harvard’s administration has attempted to discredit the Living Wage Campaign by challenging the stated facts of low-wage employment at Harvard. In doing so, the administration has tried to move the debate away from whether or not Harvard should implement a living wage towards whether or not the Living Wage Campaign is credible. But why should Harvard’s decision to implement a living wage depend upon whether 400 or 1200 workers earn below $10.25 per hour in wages? This document establishes the basic facts of employment at Harvard, citing almost exclusively the administration’s own sources. Hopefully, there will be no more dispute over facts, so that we can return to the real question:

Why not implement a living wage now?