Someone once told me that one could appear to repay the debt of gratitude for a gift by expressing effusive and lengthy thanks. This would be impossible in the case of IESE’s relationship with Harvard. So I will simply offer the university my most heartfelt congratulations, acknowledging their support with a single but emphatic “thank you.”

We are aware of the huge debt we owe Harvard University, one that we will always struggle to repay. Harvard Business School (HBS) professors lent us their support, enthusiasm and knowledge during the launch of the MBA and have been by our side all the way since then.

The century-old HBS is the management school of Harvard University. The university itself is the oldest in the United States: it was founded just 16 years after the Mayflower Pilgrims set foot on Plymouth Rock. Harvard University celebrated its 350th anniversary in 1986.

Harvard University started out in 1636 with only nine students and one professor. It currently has over 18,000 students, has produced more than 40 Nobel Prize winners and eight U.S. presidents. The eighth is President-elect Barack Obama, an alumnus of Harvard Law School.

For IESE it has been an honor to share with friends from HBS some of the events celebrating our respective “birthdays.”

Dean of HBS, Jay O. Light, set the stage for celebrations at a conference on the future of business education on IESE’s Madrid campus in May 2007.

Then in 2008, the annual meeting of the presidents from all Harvard Clubs in Europe took place in September in Madrid, where we were privileged to have Prof. Jorge Domínguez, Harvard’s vice-provost for international affairs, as a guest speaker.

The following month, we were honored by Prof. Summers’ participation at IESE’s 47th Global Alumni Reunion in Madrid in October. His talk focused on how the world can respond to insecurity in global financial systems. Summer’s insights were valuable to all of us struggling to find our feet in this turbulence.

At IESE we are proud that so many faculty members have earned their doctorates from Harvard through the years, from the most veteran professors, such as Prof. Emeritus Josep Faus, to more recent Ph.D. recipients such as Prof. Julia Prats, with the author of this article somewhere in between. Personally, I have done my best to repay the debt that IESE owes HBS, an impossible task. In the 1980s I was President of the Harvard Business School Club in Barcelona until I moved to Madrid in 1986. In 2000, I was elected President of the Harvard Club of Spain, a position I continue to hold.

I maintain close links with the university and in October I had the honor of attending the inauguration of President Drew Gilpin Faust, the first female president of Harvard University. I know two of her predecessors personally, Derek Bok and Larry Summers.

IESE’s history could not have been written without Harvard’s support. And, once again, this support has been evident in the school’s 50th anniversary.

Eduardo Ballarín