then he thanked Jeremy Knowles for the “intellectual and institutional and physical rejuvenation” of FAS. Knowles, for his part, exhumed a story from the faculty’s annals. As Henry Rosovsky narrated in The University: An Owner’s Manual, when President Derek Bok asked him in 1973 to be FAS dean, Rosovsky inquired, “If I say no, whom will you choose?”—and when told the answer, promptly accepted the position. Had he known that Kirby would be his successor, Knowles said, he would have relinquished the post years earlier.

After the faculty completed its business for the afternoon, Knowles offered a final literary assessment of his deanship, containing strategic advice for the new Dean K. Ignoring the straits in which Catholicism currently finds itself, particularly in Boston, Knowles said he had been guided by Pope John XXIII, who once said, “See everything, overlook a great deal, improve a little.”

In from the Margins

The first radiant spring day formed an auspicious backdrop for President Lawrence H. Summers’s first decanal appointment, on April 9. Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, historian of education and president of the Spencer Foundation, will direct the Graduate School of Education (GSE), beginning July 1. She succeeds Jerome T. Murphy, who stepped down exactly a year earlier, and faculty members Judith D. Singer and John B. Willett, who have jointly served as acting dean in the interim.

Before a standing-room-only crowd of GSE faculty members and students in Askwith Lecture Hall, Summers said that Lagemann knows about education and schools of education, and brings to the deanship a “deep commitment to the ideal of education, with a hard-headed, practical sense of what’s needed to bring it off.” In their conversations while Harvard sought to recruit her, Summers said, Lagemann persuaded him that “it was essential for a university like Harvard to be deeply committed to the one school in its midst whose mission is what we do,” and that she had insisted upon the University’s moral and tangible support for the GSE. Summers concluded by “pledging to her all of our support.”

Lagemann, calling herself “energized by the prospect of becoming dean,” said Summers “bowled [me] over with his ideas for the School and his unprecedented promises to help.” She then sketched some of her agenda. Citing “an auspicious moment” for education generally, Lagemann said, “To a degree that has not been true before, we are now committed to educating all children in this country to high levels. Realizing that commitment is going to require that we rethink how we recruit, educate, and structure the careers of teachers and school administrators.” It will, further, demand “research that is both scientifically rigorous and generative of knowledge that can be translated into the kinds of tools teachers really need and policymakers must have to make education policies that are intelligent.” Finally, in order to encourage interest and needed investments in education, she said “people like all of us in this room, who understand how tough, complex, and important teaching and learning are, [must] find more effective ways to educate the public about education.”

In outline, those priorities align well with a list Summers offered the GSE in a speech last fall (see “Virtual Mass. Hall,” March-April, page 71): identifying and disseminating educational “best practices”; applying knowledge about cognition and neuroscience to learning; helping to make education a widely honored profession; and designing systems of incentives, management, and accountability for effective education.

Lagemann (pronounced lah-ge-mun) has refined these interests during more than three decades of involvement in education. A 1967 graduate of Smith College, she taught social studies and history in Long Island and New York City schools for two years while acquiring a master’s in social studies at Columbia’s Teachers College. In 1973, she began a professional association with Teachers College that extended through 1994, rising from instructor and research assistant through junior faculty member to a professorship of history and education, with a joint appointment in Columbia’s history department. (She earned a Ph.D. in history and education from Columbia in 1978.) Her early books include A Generation of Women: Education in the Lives of Progressive Reformers, published by Harvard University Press, and volumes on the Carnegie Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation.

Since 1994, Lagemann has been at New York University’s school of education, where her recent interest has focused on...
the genesis and caliber of education research. An Elusive Science: The Troubling History of Education Research (2000) addresses the historically separate paths of teacher education—which she describes as thoroughly feminized, and therefore accorded low intellectual and occupational status—and of education research as evolved in expanding universities in the late 1800s and early 1900s. She notes the “widespread skepticism” at the time “concerning the relationship between the perceived ‘practical and theoretical’ aspects of education and education research,” she has written, “as well as the supposed divide between the ‘practical’ task of preparing teachers and the ‘intellectual’ work of preparing administrators and conducting research.” Teaching and education research, she has written, “have existed at much too great a distance from one another.”

In addition to analyzing that problem, Lagemann has recently been in a position to do something about it. From 1998 to 2001 she served on the National Academy of Education, and from 2000 to 2001 she served on the National Academy of Sciences’ committee on the scientific principles of education research. In 2000, she became president of the Spencer Foundation, a major supporter of education research nationwide, succeeding Patricia Albjerg Graham, now Warren research professor of the history of American education (and herself GSE dean from 1982 to 1991).

In a subsequent interview, Lagemann amplified her priorities. She acknowledged that GSE’s teacher-education program is relatively small, but praised its quality and expressed interest in expanding it. In terms of the faculty members’ research skills, she said, “Every other education school is jealous.” She wants to enhance existing research on cognition and neuroscience, organization theory, and policy, and is very interested in the possibilities of technology in education,” and hopes to secure badly needed additional financial aid for GSE students.

In the wake of federal legislation mandating widespread testing to assess performance, she worried, “We’ve gotten the accountability standards without the opportunity to learn.” The latter, she maintained, depends on strengthening teacher education; on stronger links between education and practice and policy; and on cultivating broad understanding “about the difficulties that are involved in education”—particularly in an era when society aspires to educate every child well even as all the parents in a household work, language barriers have risen, and social inequality and even homelessness hobble many students.

In all, it is an agenda meant to bring education into the center of the University’s interests. Drawing on her research, Lagemann explained, with a gesture out the window toward the Radcliffe Yard, that education and women’s education have been, “traditionally, a little bit on the margins,” intellectually and even physically. “It’s all about gender and not valuing the educational content of education.”

In making that point, and aiming to overcome it on GSE’s behalf, Lagemann’s new office seems especially well sited. As only the third woman dean in Harvard’s history, she finds herself just a few paces from the second: Drew Faust, of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. The two women have known each other since they began boarding school together at age 12, and Lagemann served on the ad hoc advisory committee that shaped Faust’s start-up agenda for the new institute. Those connections ought to ease Lagemann’s own learning process, and accelerate her efforts to bring education from the periphery to the core of Harvard’s twenty-first-century concerns.

Lagemann with her predecessors, acting co-deans John Willett and Judith Singer.

Study Abroad, Honors at Home

The Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS) has made it easier for Harvard College students to study abroad, and more difficult to earn academic honors. FAS also adopted a new grading scale which, in concert with jawboning, may slow or even reverse grade inflation. The changes, adopted at May 7 and 21 faculty meetings, concluded a year of debate and data-gathering directed by professor of history Susan G. Pedersen, who stepped down as dean of undergraduate education June 30 (see “Undergraduate Upgrade,” January-February, page 58).

The policy on study out of residence simply states that students with satisfactory academic records “may earn degree credit for course work completed successfully out of residence ordinarily at accredited or similarly recognized degree-granting institutions of higher education or at study abroad programs established by such institutions,” subject to a Harvard committee’s prior approval (see “Changing the College Curriculum,” May-June, page 50).

As such, it takes study abroad “beyond its originally conceived role” in promoting advanced language study, according to the legislation’s principal champion, William L. Fash, Bowditch professor of Central American and Mexican archaeology and ethnology—the rationale being that “the best place to study tropical-forest ecology is in tropical forests,” as he put it. Thus, the faculty encourages, but no longer requires, language study; shifts the presumption away from insisting that foreign study be a