

## Deconstructing the College Deanship

FACULTY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES dean William C. Kirby is creating a new structure to manage undergraduate life at Harvard. He expects to “reorganize the offices of the dean of undergraduate education and the dean of Harvard College,” according to a March 17 announcement, with a view toward “fully integrating these two important offices as the College enters into a major review of undergraduate education.”

The latter reference, to the study of the undergraduate curriculum now under way, made no news; it alludes to the central initiative of Kirby’s deanship to date (see page 49). But the previously unheralded restructuring, and the associated announcement that dean of the College Harry R. Lewis would “conclude his service” on June 30, were news indeed.

Two aspects of Kirby’s plan attracted particular notice. The first concerned timing. The announcement said that he had “begun a series of consultations” on the reorganization, the details of which remain to be worked out. Yet the decision to change personnel had been made, during a busy time: Lewis was conducting searches for three House masters, and the committee studying the College community’s policy and procedures for dealing with sexual assault was preparing its final report (expected in mid April, after this issue went to press).

The second, part of a perennial debate, derived from Lewis’s stature and the tenor of his deanship. He came to the job with a Harvard education (’68, Ph.D. ’74) and career (Lewis is McKay professor of computer science and has continued teaching Computer Science 121, “Introduction to Formal Systems and Computation”). Moreover, he had spelled out an administrative agenda in the “Report on the Structure of Har-

vard College,” prepared by a committee he had cochaired, and published only months before his appointment. And when he took office in July 1995, Lewis was only the second tenured faculty member to serve as College dean since 1947, and the first in more than two decades.

All those factors combined to raise expectations for increased faculty involvement in and guidance of the aspects of student life outside the classroom: the residential experience in the Houses, extracurricular activities, discipline, and so on. As Lewis put it in an interview four years into his deanship, “By having one tenured member of the faculty—me—as the dean of Harvard College and another tenured member of the faculty...as dean of undergraduate education, there has been some resolution of one of the questions that motivated the [1994] report in the first place: about having an academic hand guiding College affairs” (see “The College’s Condition,” September-October 1999, page 72). In Kirby’s new structure, would that focus now be blurred?

A DIRECT MAN given to extended analysis and prompt (seemingly around the clock) e-mailed replies to queries, Lewis effected significant change. Undergraduate assignment to Houses was randomized, to ensure reasonable diversity of talents and backgrounds among the students living in each. A fresh generation of House masters was recruited from the ranks of senior faculty members in a broad array of disciplines, and the pool of prospective masters was broadened and

deepened—no minor feat given the demands on family life and scholarship imposed by House service. Senior tutors, the primary academic and administrative advisers in the Houses, were subjected to more rigorous recruiting, training, and evaluation—resulting, by general agreement, in better skill and service. The management of Phillips Brooks House Association, the huge umbrella organization for undergraduate public-service volunteering, was professionalized.

Lewis became deeply involved in student life, and involved faculty colleagues as well—through their service on the Faculty Standing Committee on Athletic Sports, for example, which he had chaired even before becoming dean, and on the Administrative Board, the principal disciplinary body for issues of academic standing and personal conduct (for example, see “Adjudicating Sexual-Assault Cases,” July-August 2002, page 81). A fan of hockey and other sports, he defined student strengths and interests broadly—from mathematics to football or theater. That made him an outspoken advocate for space and facilities to accommodate student needs from physical fitness to dance studios: not easy demands to satisfy in the central Cambridge campus.

On the other hand, his annual letters to undergraduates stressed the importance of not devoting so much time to one activity as to preclude adequate room for exploration, discovery, academic accomplishment, and serendipitous friendship. Students have tended to perceive him as a relatively stern disciplinarian in his statements and actions against improper use of alcohol, and found him unsympathetic to their eternal requests for a student center (he repeatedly emphasized the central value of House life).

Bridging College decanal and academic perspectives, Lewis led a sustained campaign to improve academic advising (see



Harry R. Lewis

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William C. Kirby

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“Amending Advising,” March-April 2002, page 68). A skeptic about the reality of grade inflation—a subject of faculty debate and legislation last year—he made data-based arguments that sailed against the prevailing winds (see page 56).

Former FAS dean Jeremy R. Knowles, who appointed Lewis, hailed him in the March 17 announcement for his “principled concern and an unmatched commitment to our students” and said, “His openness and persuasiveness have transformed so many aspects of undergraduate life.... He has been indefatigable, a champion for logical discourse, and he has articulated—wisely, warmly, and supportively—the shape of the undergraduate experience at Harvard.”

Kirby for his part recognized Lewis as “a great dean of Harvard College. He has tackled, fearlessly, the most difficult issues facing undergraduate life and Harvard College. He is a superb administrator, who has earned the deep respect of students and faculty colleagues, not to mention the excellent staff he has assembled. He has brought to his work a passion and devotion to Harvard that is unsurpassed.”

**THEN WHY THE CHANGE?** In part, Kirby said in an interview, unifying the academic and student-life aspects of College administration has long been under consideration. Lewis’s 1994 report outlined a “single-faculty-dean” structure among its alternatives. With his own FAS deanship settling in and taking shape, Kirby said, “One reason we feel we can move ahead toward this integration is because so many of the large challenges the dean of Harvard College was facing eight years ago have been dealt with so masterfully by Dean Lewis,” and can be sustained by the staff and structure he assembled.

Kirby also sketched a broader reshaping of the FAS organization as part of his overall vision of what the undergraduate curriculum review entails—a more sweeping vision, perhaps, than has been conveyed so far. Alongside the new decanal post for the College and undergraduate education, he will appoint new faculty deans for the life sciences (a search is now under way) and for the social sciences and the humanities; these complement the existing dean of engi-

neering and applied sciences. Those discipline-based deans, alongside their undergraduate and graduate-school counterparts, will put FAS in a better

position to make faculty appointments in new fields, to create professorships that cut across departments and areas of study, and to respond more flexibly to

## Undergraduate Education Overseers

THE COMMITTEES charged with leading the Faculty of Arts and Sciences review of the undergraduate curriculum (see “College Studies,” January-February, page 61) have been defined and, at least in part, populated. In early March, Dean William C. Kirby appointed the faculty co-chairs of four working groups. Each committee will ultimately comprise eight faculty members, two undergraduates, one graduate student, and one administrator. The groups, their chairs, and their responsibilities are, respectively:

**The overall academic experience.** Jay M. Harris, Wolfson professor of Jewish studies in the department of Near Eastern languages and civilizations, and Lisa L. Martin, Dillon professor of international affairs in the department of government, will lead the review of the freshman year, the timing of concentration choice, advising, study abroad, the connection between academic and extracurricular activities, and other broad questions concerning the curriculum.

**Pedagogy.** Lizabeth Cohen, Jones professor of American studies, and Richard M. Losick, Cabot professor of biology and Harvard College

Professor, and colleagues will examine the effectiveness of lectures and sections, freshman and other seminars, the role of tutorials, the issue of curricular “progression” (perhaps toward a cap-

stone experience, such as a thesis), instruction in writing and study of foreign languages, reading period, use of the Internet, and other aspects of teaching.

**General education.** Peter K. Bol Carswell professor of East Asian languages and civilizations Peter K. Bol and Eric N. Jacobsen, Emery professor of chemistry—both also Harvard College Professors—are charged with directing the study of students’ educational breadth in the twenty-first century, the proportion of the curriculum devoted to general education and its form, and the generation of suitable courses.

**Concentration.** Lawrence Katz, professor of economics, and Diana Sorensen, professor of Romance languages and literatures, and their working-group members will examine the purpose of concentration, the array of concentration options, how they relate to departments and interdisciplinary committees, and the structure of concentrations, minors, and certificates.

Undergraduate education dean Benedict H. Gross invited College students to apply for seats on the committees; he will use the Undergraduate Council to vet applications. Candidates were told that the committees will meet several times this term, and weekly throughout the next academic year. Kirby charged the groups with reporting their findings next spring.



**Peter K. Bol**



**Eric N. Jacobsen**



**Lisa L. Martin**



**Lizabeth Cohen**



**Richard M. Losick**



**Diana Sorensen**

rapid change—particularly in science.

That broad intellectual context will have much to do with shaping the undergraduate experience as a result of the curriculum review, Kirby said. “We only do this every 35 years,” and so he decided to proceed now, even though the curriculum review is already on a short deadline. (It is due to report next spring; that has put the faculty members and dean of undergraduate education Benedict H. Gross under significant pressure.)

DOES THIS INTELLECTUAL AGENDA risk relegating students’ extracurricular experience to the periphery of their undergraduate years? This was, perhaps, the largest question circulating around the end of the College deanship, which under Lewis had given an unusual and supportive faculty voice to extracurricular and residential life. President Lawrence H. Summers has made the curriculum review a focus of his attention—and has made a point both of frequent interaction with students in late-night House study breaks and social events, and of strong advocacy

for tighter standards for grading and academic honors. As a result, the larger issues of undergraduate expectations and experiences have come into play during the past 18 months. The *Crimson* captured the theme in a headline the day after Kirby’s announcement: “Lewis Departure May Mean Shift in College’s Priorities.”

Kirby took pains to dispel such concerns. “We want to devote enormous attention to undergraduate education over the next several years,” he said. That embraces not only classroom requirements and learning but also the opportunity to “think about the overall educational experience at Harvard and to support all sides of it—the formal, academic side, the extracurricular interests, which we need to support further, in fact, and our support of students’ lives, their personal and physical well being”—including athletics, recreation, and healthcare.

Indeed, he turned the concern upside down. “Some students seem to believe this is a plan to cut down on extracurriculars and make them more studious,” he said. But in his view, “Our students have a

wonderfully rich extracurricular life. We have an obligation to give them an equally rich academic life.” That might mean finding ways to support theater arts in the curriculum, much as music is strong both outside the classroom and within. Visual arts, he said, are abundant in both ways, but not in parallel to musical experiences on campus. And he spoke of the “significant challenges ahead” in securing adequate and expanded arts facilities.

Lewis, having studied options for the College deanship and then executed the responsibilities of the office for eight years, now reflects that “Structure doesn’t matter nearly as much as the people do.” In that regard, he feels particularly good about the ranks of House masters, senior tutors, and College staff in place. He resumes his full-time faculty responsibilities as of July 1. As dean, he called his course his favorite three hours of the week, and he will return to the classroom next fall with the additional title of Harvard College Professor, an honor conferred by Kirby for Lewis’s “teaching and for his dedication to undergraduate education.”

## Affirmative Amicus

CONTINUING A LONG TRADITION of University leadership on diversity in admissions, Harvard filed an amicus curiae brief in the University of Michigan cases scheduled for argument before the Supreme Court on April 1. The brief—filed February 17 on behalf of Harvard, Brown, the University of Chicago, Dartmouth, Duke, the University of Pennsylva-

nia, Princeton, and Yale—presented the case in favor of continuing to consider race as one factor in individualized admissions systems. (The text appears on line at [www.news.harvard.edu/gazette/daily/0302/17-amicus.html](http://www.news.harvard.edu/gazette/daily/0302/17-amicus.html).)

In a statement accompanying the filing, President Lawrence H. Summers emphasized the “vital educational benefits for all students” of bringing them together from different backgrounds, and the benefit to society of educating graduates who will, accordingly, be better prepared to “serve as leaders in a multiracial society.” Such admissions policies, he noted, “carefully consider each applicant as a whole individual, not just as a product of grades or test scores,” and so are more appropriate than externally imposed “blunter” policies or standards that purport to be oblivious to ethnicity or race.

Harvard’s friend-of-the-

court role is of special interest because its admissions procedure was singled out in the precedent-setting 1978 *Bakke* case, the current legal underpinning for educational institutions’ admissions processes that take race into account in evaluating individual applicants. In the years since, then-president (now president emeritus) Derek Bok and Princeton president emeritus William G. Bowen wrote *The Shape of the River*, the most comprehensive study of the effects of considering race as part of college and university admissions (reviewed in the November-December 1998 issue, page 27). Bok’s immediate successor, Neil L. Rudenstine, made the educational benefits of diversity the subject of his *President’s Report 1993-1995: Diversity and Learning* (excerpted in the March-April 1996 magazine, page 48). Those works, current writings on the subject by Bok, Rudenstine, and Bowen, and recent research by Harvard scholars are all cited in the brief, lending a strong chain of support to its argument that the “principle underlying *Bakke* has become the basis of well-settled reliance” not only by the amici, but by sec-



The United States Supreme Court