Katrina’s Ripples

In response to Hurricane Katrina, Harvard College, the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, the Graduate School of Education, and Harvard Law School each offered to accept 25 students from affected institutions for a semester of tuition-free study—an accommodation comparable to those made by peer universities. The Graduate School of Design and Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH) made places available, too. And the Extension School also offered up to four courses, free of tuition, to students who live within commuting distance and would otherwise be enrolled at institutions closed by flooding. Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS) dean William C. Kirby reported on September 27 that some 100 applicants sought to study at the College, 45 were admitted, and three dozen are enrolled, most from Tulane; the graduate school admitted 20 students, enrolling 15, and the extension school 20 more.

Drawing on its scholarly expertise, Harvard Medical School offered a free on-line family disaster-planning guide (www.health.harvard.edu/disaster). And professor of geology and geophysics Göran Ekström’s Science A-43 Core course, “Environmental Risks and Disasters,” seemed, sadly, even more relevant. More broadly, on September 30, the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative sponsored a “teach-in” on Katrina moderated by Jennifer Leaning, professor of the practice of international health at HSPH. The 11 panelists, from HSPH, the business and medical schools, the Kennedy School, and FAS, drew on their experience in natural disasters, wars, refugee crises, and other catastrophes around the world to stimulate thinking about the U.S. response to its own unaccustomed humanitarian horrors. Among the speakers, Michael VanRooyen, of the division of international health and humanitarian programs at Brigham and Women’s Hospital, lamented planners’ shortsightedness toward the most vulnerable population in New Orleans—the reverse of practices he has advocated and helped implement in Sudan, Haiti, and elsewhere. As a result, he said, the United States “passively condemned the survival of the fittest” as its policy. Assistant professor of psychiatry David Henderson focused on the characteristic marginalization of mental-health care for people who had been traumatized by the death of relatives, destruction of property, and loss of control over their lives—treatment he compared to the lack of resources in impoverished nations like Rwanda. A separate discussion, about public-health priorities, was held on October 6 at HSPH.

President Lawrence H. Summers made Katrina and the enduring social and racial inequities it revealed the subject of his Morning Prayers remarks on September 19, the first day of classes (see www.president.harvard.edu).

And putting money behind its talk, the University, echoing a precedent it established after the Asian tsunami disaster, offered to match faculty, staff, and student contributions to relief organizations, up to $100. The tsunami drive netted 3,359 donations from faculty, staff, and students, totaling $307,255; using unrestricted University funds, Harvard matched qualifying gifts in the amount of $245,877. (In an interesting twist, Yale also extended a $100-matching program within its community for donations to Katrina relief. But those matching funds were provided by personal charitable contributions from the seven university officers, totaling $70,000, and deans and fellows of the Yale Corporation—not from institutional resources.)
University People

Vice President's Ciao
Vice president for finance Ann E. Berman will relinquish the position next April. Berman, who has lived in and worked from Italy during the summer months since her appointment in 2002, cited a desire to spend half of each year there. She will continue to work on special projects for the University. In a statement accompanying the announcement, President Lawrence H. Summers cited her success in “improving both the effectiveness and efficiency of financial management” at Harvard. Treasurer James F. Rothenberg said that “in no small part” due to Berman’s work, “at a time when universities across the country were forced to cut programs and suspend construction projects, Harvard was able to stay focused on its academic mission and plan for continued growth and expansion.” A search for her successor is underway.

Mme. MacArthur
The 2005 MacArthur Fellows, who receive $500,000 of unrestricted support over five years, include physician Sue Goldie, associate professor of health decision science in the Harvard School of Public Health. Goldie uses quantitative techniques to analyze diseases such as HIV, hepatitis C, and cervical cancer caused by human papilloma virus (see “Medicine by Model,” July-August 2002, page 44). She is now pursuing this work in part through the Harvard Initiative for Global Health (see “Global Health Aims HIGH,” January-February 2005, page 61). Alumni recipients include Pehr Harbury ’87, Ph.D. ’94, associate professor of biochemistry at Stanford; Nicole King, Ph.D. ’93, assistant professor of molecular and cell biology at Berkeley; and Michael Magna, Ph.D. ’94, associate professor of earth and planetary science, also at Berkeley.

Humanities Hat Trick
Homi K. Bhabha, Rothenberg professor of English and American literature and language and recently appointed director of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences’s Humanities Center (see “A Humanist Who Knows Corn Flakes,” September-October, page 64), has taken on a third responsibility: he will serve as senior advisor in the humanities at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study.

Mass Hall Makeover
President Lawrence H. Summers prepared for the academic year by formally announcing new senior staff members in an official news release, a first. A. Clayton Spencer, since 1998 associate vice president for higher education policy, becomes vice president for policy, a new position. In this capacity, she assumes “a broader role overseeing the work of the president’s office” with the aim of ensuring “a more integrated approach to activities that entail cooperative efforts with other departments or schools.” Spencer, a lawyer and trustee of Phillips Exeter Academy and Williams College, has worked on such issues as creating the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study and enhancing financial aid for lower-income students. She has also served as liaison to several schools and staffed decanal searches. Citing Harvard’s “ambitious goals,” she said, “As we move forward, the emphasis increasingly will be on effective execution.” The president’s new chief of staff, Kasia Lundy ’95, M.B.A. ’00, previously served as a staff member on the Allston Initiative task force on undergraduate life and the University’s Task Force on Women Faculty. Her Harvard experience distinguishes her from her two predecessors, who had previously worked in the U.S. Treasury Department, where Summers was Secretary before becoming Harvard’s president in 2001. John Longbrake, the new senior director of communications (the principal spokesman for the president and provost), is a Treasury public-affairs veteran.

institution. HLS has no such support, but the University now receives about a half-billion dollars of federal research money annually, all of it at risk over the terms of job interviews for candidates for the military’s legal service. The University, interestingly, has reversed its legal posture as well, signing a brief that challenges the Solomon Amendment in litigation that reaches the Supreme Court—and Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. ’76, J.D. ’79—this fall.

Kagan’s letter explained that HLS policy, adopted in 1979, requires employers using OCS to recruit to “sign a statement indicating that [they do] not discriminate on various bases, including sexual orientation.” The military’s “Don’t ask, don’t tell” standard, barring service by acknowledged homosexuals, fails this test. But in 2002, faced with more aggressive Pentagon use of the Solomon Amendment, HLS “re-luctantly created an exemption from the...antidiscrimination policy for the military,” continuing it in 2003 and 2004.

In 2003, the Forum of Academic and Institutional Rights (FAIR), a consortium of law schools (HLS is not a member), filed a lawsuit challenging the amendment. But President Lawrence H. Summers, while deploiring the Solomon Amendment and a military policy which “offends ideals of nondiscrimination and individual dignity,” declined to litigate, preferring quieter means to try to effect changes. Kagan and a majority of HLS faculty, on their own, did file a brief, as did a student group, HLS Lambda (see “Military Recruiting: The Lawsuits,” March-April 2004, page 74). Last November, the Third Circuit Court of Appeals enjoined enforcement of the Solomon Amendment and Kagan promptly reinstated the ban.
for the spring 2005 hiring season (see “Recruiting Redux,” July-August, page 60).

Pending Supreme Court review, however, the Third Circuit ruling is stayed, and HLS’s decision subjected Harvard to renewed financial pressure. That prompted Kagan’s reversal, with “regret” at accommodating a federal policy she characterized as “unwise and unjust.”

On September 21, Kagan and 39 colleagues filed an amicus brief in the FAIR case, arguing that military recruiters already have access to students on the same terms as all other prospective employers. More newsworthy, Summers announced that Harvard would join the amicus brief filed by Yale, Columbia, Cornell, New York University, the University of Chicago, and the University of Pennsylvania in support of FAIR’s main argument—that the federal law, improperly coercive, violates free-speech rights within the academy.

Thomas H. Parry ’74, a former elected director of the Harvard Alumni Association and now president of the Harvard Gay and Lesbian Caucus, which had previously criticized Summers, applauded the decision to join the lawsuit. The caucus, he said, urged Summers to go further, “using his considerable clout to raise public awareness that the Solomon Amendment is an insidious attack on the First Amendment. Sexual orientation may be the issue of the day, but if the law is not struck down, then Congress will be free to use the power of the purse to make academic policy wherever and whenever it likes.”

Reforesting the Yard

Savaged by insects, ravaged by disease and old age, the elms of Harvard Yard were much diminished by 1990 (see photographs, below), when Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates began crafting a plan for an arboreal restoration. Van Valkenburgh’s idea, inspired by a lone red oak outside Holworthy Hall, was to replace the Ulmus americana monoculture with a diverse palette of tree species that would be trained to form an elm-like canopy. Fifteen years later, the trees are in late adolescence, and the Yard is a much greener place. Not that lessons weren’t learned along the way, says Van Valkenburgh, the Eliot professor of practice at the Graduate School of Design. Swamp white oaks, “the biggest delightful surprise,” he says, have thrived in the Yard’s heavy soils and areas with poor drainage, as have the pin oaks, which are particularly easy to “limb up” (remove the lowest branches). “Another great triumph is the hybrid hackberry,” which is both tough and “wonderfully elmlike” in shape. Among the biggest disappointments were the tulip poplars, which were fast growing, but couldn’t tolerate the Yard’s compacted soils and an especially cold winter two years ago. The willow oaks, which reach the northern edge of their natural range in Boston, died then, too, and are thought to have been killed by that same mid-winter arctic blast. Outside the main spaces, evergreens have flourished and Van Valkenburgh hopes to add more of these at the margins for their beauty in the winter landscape. Finally, he says, “An old adage proved true: Plant a small tree in a well-prepared hole.” Twelve years later, trees planted at just 3-inch caliper have surpassed trees that went in at two to three times that size.