though it will dissolve the concentration he directs. “Other faculty were surprised by how open and not turf-oriented Rich was and is,” Lue says. “Biomedical sciences is a jewel.” Yet Losick’s support makes sense. The new curriculum is based on a pair of common courses, Life Sciences 1a and 1b, that premiered this past year—Lue co-taught the former in the fall—and reflect the front-loaded, interactive approach Losick and Lue have been perfecting for years (see “Enlivening Science,” July-August 2005, page 62). “Rich and I were very concerned about making the freshman experience both much more exciting for students and much more reflective of what is exciting in science today,” Lue says. “You get them as first-semester freshmen and they develop an expectation for what a lecture course could be.”

Life Sciences 1a, which Lue says was developed in consultation with Losick and other experienced teachers on campus, offers an integrated introduction to biology and chemistry through “framing questions” based in recent, rather than canonic, discovery. (The course taught concepts in chemistry and biology, for instance, by examining how cancer and the HIV virus work.) Not only was enrollment 30 percent higher than its predecessor’s, but attendance hovered at 80 percent through the semester—even though class was held at the student-unfriendly hour of 9:30 a.m. and lecture videos were available on-line. “I’ve taught at Harvard for almost 20 years,” Lue says, “and I’ve never seen such energy.”

Losick says he expects the new life-sciences courses to have a “ripple effect” through the redesigned sciences, forcing higher-level courses to be reshaped in a similar vein. The prospect excites him. He also thinks the new concentration structures might open up space for more research earlier in the curriculum. “There’s more talk of having more MCB-100-like courses in other fields,” he reports.

Funding for Losick’s disadvantaged-students program is uncertain—he hopes a benefactor will step in before 2010, when his renewal grant expires—but, for the moment, he likes meeting a new group of budding scientists every year and watching them pass on their experiences as they grow. “The idea is that the upper-level students would be mentors and role models for the lower-level students,” he says. Whether this ideal holds up in practice, of course, is something that only time—and trial—will tell. ~NATHAN HELLER

Israel and Academia

On March 23, the London Review of Books published a long essay on “The Israel Lobby,” by Harrison distinguished service professor of political science John J. Mearsheimer of the University of Chicago (a West Point graduate), and Stephen M. Walt, Belfer professor of international affairs at the Kennedy School of Government, where his term as academic dean concluded at the end of this school year. The paper explained a policy based on “unwavering support for Israel” that has “inflamed Arab and Islamic opinion” and “jeopardized” United States security. Rather than being based on “shared strategic interests or compelling moral imperatives,” the authors found, the policy derives “almost entirely from domestic politics, and especially the activities of the Israel Lobby.” That lobby, they wrote, campaigns to “quash debate about Israel” by such means as “organizing blacklisters and boycotters—or by suggesting that critics are anti-Semites.”

Readers were referred to a longer, footnoted version at http://ksgnotes1.harvard.edu/Research/wpapers.nsf/rwp/RWP06-011.

Not to the authors’ surprise, the paper provoked wide responses (initially in the New York Sun and then in foreign-policy centers worldwide)—many of them more focused on the authors’ purported politics, or whether they or their argument were anti-Semitic, than on the substance of their claims. The Kennedy School welcomed scholarly responses, and Frankfurter professor of law Alan M. Dershowitz took the opportunity, publishing a 44-page “Debunking the Newest—and Oldest—Jewish Conspiracy” on April 5 (www.ksg.harvard.edu/research/workings_papers/abstract_dersh1.html). He heatedly characterized the Mearsheimer-Walt work as “little more than a compilation of old, false, and authoritatively discredited charges dressed up in academic garb” and “dependent on biased, extremist and anti-American sources.”

As the debate toned down, its substantive weight increased. Tony Judt of New York University and author of Postwar, an acclaimed history of modern Europe, asked in a New York Times essay how future Americans would view the close alignment of “the imperial might and international reputation of the United States” with “one small, controversial Mediterranean client state” and suggested how other nations viewed matters today. Columbia Journalism Review contributing editor Michael Massing, writing in the New York Review of Books, criticized Mearsheimer and Walt for important flaws in their work and for their paper’s “thin documentation”—and then proceeded, by detailed reporting, to suggest how the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and related entities work and what the news coverage of controversy reveals. He concluded that the central Mearsheimer-Walt argument was “entirely correct,” and that its flaws notwithstanding, their essay usefully opened for debate “a subject that has for too long remained taboo.”