Core course, Historical Study A-34, “Medicine and Society in America,” and writes on the social and ethical aspects of health, disease, and medical practice, focusing on twentieth-century America. No Magic Bullet explores venereal disease. The Cigarette Century: The Rise, Fall, and Deadly Persistence of the Tobacco Industry (see “The Fall of the House of Ashes?” July-August 1996, page 19, on the research then in progress). It won the Albert J. Beveridge Prize of the American Historical Association and the Arthur Viseltear Prize of the American Public Health Association. On his website for the book, Brandt wrote, “We now confront a worldwide pandemic of tobacco-related diseases as cigarette use has spread...It is my hope that The Cigarette Century provides a strong foundation for a critical discussion of new strategies to

Focusing on the Ph.D.

During her tenure as dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS), from mid 2005 through last December, Theda Skocpol says, “I got a Ph.D. in what it means to be a university administrator in two and a half years.” Recognizing that the graduate-student experience can be far more diverse, isolated, and protracted than the undergraduate experience, Skocpol, who is Thomas professor of government and sociology, focused attention on graduate education as a whole in an effort to better ensure those students’ successful preparation for their future role as scholars.

• Time to degree. Early in her deanship, Skocpol recalled during a December conversation, she sought data on each of the separate Ph.D. programs—in particular, on how long it took students to complete coursework, their general examinations, and the dissertation. Such data had rarely been gathered, and even less frequently shared—despite national statistics indicating that fewer than half of humanities students complete the doctorate within 10 years. (The time to degree is typically longest in the humanities, where students may have to master multiple languages, and shortest in the sciences; social sciences fall in between.)

As of 2003-2004, according to the data, 8.5 percent of Harvard humanities and social-sciences Ph.D. candidates were beyond their eighth year of graduate study—suggesting problems in completing their programs that put at risk their own careers and faculty members’ investment in these advisees (plus hundreds of thousands of dollars of Harvard support). Skocpol talks about students getting “lost.” Departmental performance—when members of an entering cohort took their generals, for example—varied widely.

In response, GSAS took corrective action. Funding was secured for dissertation fellowships: a year of writing uninterrupted by teaching, provided students have completed chapters in hand by their sixth year (or sooner) and use the funds in their seventh (so the money isn’t an incentive to further delay). Near-