Amy Wagers, an HMS assistant professor of pathology, figured out a way to identify adult stem cells in muscle by means of the unique protein markers on their surfaces. She then transplanted stem cells from the muscles of healthy mice into mice with the disease. The stem cells not only restored partial muscle function, she reported, but also replenished the pool of stem cells that “could be reactivated to repair the muscle again during a second injury.” For now, the technique works only on a muscle-by-muscle basis, making it impractical for treatments, but the work proves the viability of stem-cell transplantation.

The summer’s announcements were not isolated successes, but proof that HSCI works as a model for catalyzing collaborative research, says executive director Reeve. HSCI faculty members “are publishing on average 30 papers a month in peer-reviewed journals,” he adds. The organization’s budget for scientific research and operations has increased from $5 million to just over $16 million in the last three years, with 80 percent of the funding to date coming from individuals. (That will change with increasing sponsorship from industry: GlaxoSmithKline recently pledged $25 million to support HSCI during the next five years. Reeve notes that the development of disease-specific iPSC stem-cell lines is of particular interest to the pharmaceutical industry, because it will not only provide therapies, but also offer the ability to test drugs against specific diseases on an unprecedented scale.)

The growth in stem-cell research at Harvard has been even more rapid than anticipated: a shared therapeutic screening facility designed to handle the work of HSCI researchers until the opening of the first science building in Allston three years from now is already operating at capacity. New courses are being offered this year through the department of extracurricular discussion series; around the same time, Gale professor of education Richard J. Light, author of Making the Most of College (see “The Storyteller,” January-February 2001, page 32), was hearing similar complaints in his survey of the classes of 2006 and 2007. Dingman and Light assembled a working group of three students (including Beckett), director of freshman programming Katherine Steele, and Gardner (who had led similar efforts at Amherst and Colby) to help design Harvard’s discussions. The group selected faculty members and administrators to lead discussions and then invited the entire class of 2011 to participate. About 8 percent of the class—130 students—took part in “Reflecting on Your Life.”

Each group met a minimum of three times for 90 minutes last spring. Leaders could decide how to structure the meetings, but, Steele says, one widely used exercise that proved “illuminating” was asking the first-years to state their core values, then account for how they spent their time in a given week, and see how closely their everyday pursuits and values corresponded.

Judith Kidd, who oversees student life and activities as associate dean of the College, explains that today’s students “are used to having their activities planned for them.” This is the play-date generation; its members feel more comfortable airing young-adult angst in an officially sanctioned forum. “It’s sad that if they are going to have these conversations, we need to arrange them,” she says, “but I think we need to do it.”

In the “Reflecting” program for first-years (which will be repeated this year) and in “The Big Question,” a dinner discussion series arranged by student members of the Phillips Brooks House Association, undergraduates can say what they think without worrying that it will affect
their grades, says Jessica Ranucci ’10, one of the “Big Question” organizers this year. In its three years, the series has explored such topics as whether pursuing a career in business necessarily means “selling out,” and whether popular spring-break-week community-service trips really help, or are better summed up as “service tourism.”

Of course, a major reason for articulating one’s morals and values is to make it possible to choose a career that fits those beliefs. President Drew Faust gave graduating seniors one last nudge in that direction during her baccalaureate address in June: “A liberal education demands that you live self-consciously. It prepares you to seek and define the meaning inherent in all you do.”

Faust began that speech by noting that numerous students and recent graduates had expressed concern to her about the number of Harvard alumni going into consulting and finance. Reiterating this message before alumni at the Harvard Gay and Lesbian Caucus anniversary in September (see “Coming Out at Harvard,” page 70), Faust said she got the impression that some students felt their career choices were not entirely voluntary: “I felt they were asking permission to do something different.”

Efforts abound to introduce students to that “something different.” The Office of Career Services (OCS) has launched a campaign to “turn up the volume” on career options other than investment banking and consulting. (“We didn’t want to turn down the volume on opportunities in consulting and finance,” explains OCS interim director Robin Mount. “We have one of the top programs in the country, and we’re really proud of that.”) The OCS fall schedule of events includes sessions on fields ranging from fashion design, museum administration, and social work to the ministry, fiction writing, culinary arts, and the military. The schedule also includes new events that invite students to discuss financial careers frankly (“Banking and Consulting: Myths and Realities”). And there is now a “career reflection” category (sessions include “Finding a Meaningful Path: What’s Your Story?”).

The number of graduates who take jobs in banking and consulting is not well established. A Crimson survey found that
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“Our ability to access endowment wealth has enabled us to move forward” on priorities such as the new science complex in Allston, renovation of the Fogg Art Museum, and financial aid for lower- and middle-income families. So said acting chief financial officer Daniel S. Shore, reviewing fiscal year 2008 (ended June 30), as detailed in the Harvard University Financial Report, released in October (available on line at http://vpf-web.harvard.edu/annualfinancial). His assessment nearly summarized Harvard’s fiscal position, aims, and challenges.

Fueled above all by distributions from the endowment to fund operations raises questions about future budgets—particularly, Shore said, “in an environment where the ability to get sponsored-research funding from the federal government continues to be challenging.”

A few line items in the report merit examination. Federal sponsored funding rose about 4 percent, to $535 million, with National Institutes of Health funding up less than 2 percent. That was better than the worrisome decline in fiscal year 2007, but did not keep pace with either the inflation in research costs nor the larger population of scientists seeking funds. Shore said the slight improvement likely reflected no trend: “Up 2 percent in nominal terms is nothing to jump up and down about.”

Among Harvard’s expenses—up a brisk $234 million—compensation costs, the largest single category, rose 7 percent, reflecting an 8 percent increase in salaries and wages (driven, Shore said, by both pay increases and workforce expansion), and a 6 percent growth in benefits (relatively favorable compared to recent experience). The allocation of expenses between the University and the Broad Institute (a genomics-research joint venture with MIT, which will become a freestanding nonprofit organization in the next year or two), and between Harvard and an affiliated hospital, increased expenses more than $40 million in fiscal year 2008 compared to the prior year; that ought to be seen as a short-term, largely nonrecurring swing, according to Sharon D. DeMaranville, director of financial reporting. Travel expenses rose 18 percent, in line with a recent trend, as the University continues to “expand our footprint internationally,” Shore said.

Capital spending declined...