are arranged in logical order by how useful each is to the discipline nearest it in the diagram opposite).

By leveraging its faculty in this way, and without aspiring to be an MIT (where Murray earned her undergraduate and Ph.D. degrees), SEAS can nevertheless excel in certain niches within 10 years, she believes: “For example, with a world-class medical school and all of the hospitals, pharma, and biotech around here, we need to do bioengineering.” (A Ph.D. program in that field is in the works.) For now though, “All the areas are too small.”

As the school grows, Murray intends to guard its unique administrative structure, in which area associate deans report directly to her (there are no departments), preserving its open and collaborative research environment. As for her own style, she says, “I believe in management as supporting infrastructure, so that is what I call it: ‘enabling support.’ Associate deans are actually enabling the faculty to do their work.”

SEAS, a financially and administratively independent part of FAS, now relies on its own endowment for almost 50 percent of its annual income. Murray would like to shrink that number to 35 percent or so; she says that will require more income from sponsored research and from interactions with industry—goals more readily achievable with a larger faculty.

Eventually Murray would like to teach and to collaborate on research in soft condensed matter, nanobiology, or nanotechnology, but for now, the school itself is her primary focus. “SEAS is growing and it really needs a lot of attention,” she says straightforwardly. “I’m enthusiastic about that.”

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**THE UNDERGRADUATE**

**Post Pre-Med**

*by Melanie Long ’10*

Every year as hundreds of freshmen come to Harvard intent on the pre-med track, hundreds of upperclassmen leave it. I became one of the many who leave after I discovered that, although medicine is an honorable field, it was not the right choice for me. Taking courses that fill pre-med requirements, such as Life Sciences 1a and Math 1b, becomes a sort of rite of passage for approximately half of the freshman class who are considering a career in medicine: most complain about the difficulty of the courses and the hard problem sets. Meanwhile, I found that even though I was celebrating because my pre-med career had ended before I had to take the often dreaded organic-chemistry requirement, I also began lamenting losing the sense of community that comes with being pre-med.

During my senior year of high school, I decided on a career in medicine after learning about the organization Doctors Without Borders. Their work inspired me, and the prospect of pursuing a career that would enable me to participate in similar work was exciting. I enjoyed math and science and was active in many related clubs in school, so I figured this was enough to determine that medicine was the perfect choice. The summer before coming to Harvard, I began mapping out the pre-med requirements and which courses would fulfill them, so my academic schedule would allow me to be pre-med while I concentrated in English.

I arrived on campus relieved that I didn’t have to go to the many meetings offered during freshman orientation that catered to students undecided about their concentration. I knew where I was going and what I had to do to get there. I took the necessary courses, signed up for the Harvard Pre-medical Society (HPS) mailing list (by spring semester I was the organization’s secretary), and picked up pamphlets from the Office of Career Services (OCS). I didn’t have to worry about what my future would hold because—though it was not set in stone—I knew the direction it was going to take.

By the end of freshman year, my seemingly ironed-out path began to show some wrinkles. I didn’t enjoy the science courses as much as I had anticipated. While making a difference in my community still appealed to me, medicine didn’t as much. These doubts were confirmed after I attended the national Summer Medical and Dental Education Program funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which enables college freshmen and sophomores to take classes that will prepare them for their pre-med courses and gives them the opportunity to shadow doctors in a hospital. I enjoyed the writing course much more than the science courses and during the hospital visits—unlike my classmates who looked eagerly at the procedures—I leaned against the wall, trying to prevent myself from fainting and ending up on the bed next to the patient we were supposed to observe. At the end of the program, I happily made my official decision to stop being pre-med.

When I arrived back on campus for sophomore fall, I discovered that a couple of friends had also decided to drop
pre-med during the summer and we celebrated the decision together. I now had space for electives, more time for extracurricular activities, and no need to prepare for the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT).

But as the glow of being free of pre-med began to wear off, I began to notice that some losses came along with the gains. I felt that I should not run for re-election as secretary of HPS, to open up the position for someone who was still pre-med, even though I had enjoyed being a part of the executive board and valued the relationships I had formed as a member. As my first semester of all-humanities courses was under way, I realized that although those late nights in the Science Center finishing seemingly impossible problem sets were challenging at times, they were also fun because I was able to connect with my classmates and make new friends. Staying up all night finishing a paper alone seemed so lonely in comparison.

**Being pre-med is more than a set of course requirements: it’s a lifestyle.**

As a pre-med you know you should take a leadership position in organizations such as the Harvard Cancer Society or the Community Health Initiative, you should volunteer at a hospital or nursing home, and you should work in a research lab. When you see someone else buying an MCAT prep book at the Coop, a bond is automatically established. Your schedule is always busy, you’re often stressed, doubts about whether it is all worth it may come, but in the end you know what you need to do. After I stopped being pre-med, I no longer knew what I needed to do, and frankly, that scared me. I had to decide what to do outside of class, or I might miss opportunities that could prepare me for some new career I still had not chosen.

I eventually joined new extracurricular groups and adjusted to an all-humanities course load, but getting used to not knowing where my life after Harvard was going proved much harder. I began frantically researching different careers, trying to find the perfect job for me. The sense of assurance about my future that came with being pre-med was gone. I now know that my worrying was unnecessary: I had plenty of time to figure out what to do next. Not having a plan was actually a great opportunity for me to reflect on my interests and take the time that I didn’t take before to discover what I am passionate about. Yet it took me a year to achieve this perspective.

My friends who continued the pre-med journey also came eventually to a crossroads where they questioned if medicine was the right choice for them. Some of them considered graduate school or teaching as possible alternatives, but after many late-night conversations (including a few that lasted until the sun came up) and some soul-searching, they decided that medicine was what they wanted to do. Every career takes preparation and requires a time commitment, but becoming a doctor is unique in that one must devote more than 10 years to it before one is board-certified. The idea that you have invested your youth in a career that you may not even like is intimidating. Even though you can shadow doctors and volunteer in hospitals, you never know what it is like to be a doctor until you become one. My friends’ decisions to remain pre-med after facing the doubts became sounder because of having been tested.

More than two-thirds of the members of every graduating class choose to go to graduate/professional school or enter a financial/consulting career. I know that neither of those options is for me. I recently went to the OCS Career Forum hoping to get a strong start to my job search. For the first time, I actually dressed “business casual” and came prepared with copies of my résumé, whereas in past years I had devoted my time to accumulating as much swag as possible. The companies represented at the career forum reflected my classmates’ strong interest in financial and consulting careers, but as I made my way among the tables I found many organizations that appealed to my interests, including the Foreign Service—an option that I had not considered before.

That was when it really hit me that not being locked into a certain career path is fun. Now I can do anything I want. Senior year does come with ample anxiety about post-grad life that both students who are undecided and those with clear plans have to endure. But the stack of informational pamphlets from the Career Forum sitting on my desk is an open door to new experiences, many of which I had never taken the time to dream of before.

*Berta Greenwald Ledecky Undergraduate Fellow
Melanie Long ’10 hopes that joblessness is not her default option after graduation.*

Illustration by Susan Gal