Professor video,” by Craig Lambert (November–December 2009, page 34) left me mildly depressed. Not because I teach here, but because my college-bound daughter is considering applying here. When she was in public school, her parents fought the history teacher who relied on Hollywood movies. Now she would get to watch Keira Knightley in a course on the eighteenth-century novel?

As regards the “most downloaded science animation in history,” which lies closer to my field of expertise: There is a lively debate about whether such movies are helpful in teaching cell biology. In producing these full-color 3-D animations, many creative liberties are taken. For example, the motions of all the molecular players are portrayed as they might appear on the macroscopic scale. They bounce, fall, jiggle, and travel on straight paths toward their reaction partners. The laws of physics forbid any such behavior inside a cell. So the seductive familiarity of these animations makes them at once compelling and potentially misleading. This conflict does not arise when we draw the fundamental principles on the board with chalk.

More generally, what is the urgency to adopt the style of YouTube, just because our students spend their free time with it? I don’t recall professors in the ’60s adopting the comic book form because their students grew up with Marvel superheroes. What happened to the notion of stretching a student’s mind by taking him out of the comfort zone?

Markus Meister
Professor of Molecular and Cellular Biology
Cambridge

Robert Lue, professor of the practice of molecular and cellular biology, responds: No animation can show everything, in the same way that no textbook or chalkboard diagram can ever do justice to the full complexity of a biological process. The decision not to show random molecular motion in a subset of our animations is based on the particular goals of those animations. The primary focus of The Inner Life of the Cell is not simply molecular motion; to include it would have obscured the cellular processes. We have found it more effective to portray molecular motion in other animations. Three years of student assessments indicate that unintended misconceptions on molecular motion arise less frequently from an animation like this one than they do from textbook diagrams.

Visual and digital media are not just vehicles to teach with, not just window-dressing to gussy up one’s teaching performance. They’re texts that need to be questioned and analyzed like any other. Reading about the latest efforts to use film, videos, images, audio, and interactive media took me back to 1993 and 1994, when I offered a summer professional development program, the Harvard Insti-
tute in Media Education. K-12 and college teachers spent a week exploring instructional practices to help learners critically analyze images from mass media and popular culture. Then, the practice of media literacy education was in its infancy. The rich conversations generated by the event led to the formation of the National Association for Media Literacy Education.

Today, there is a growing body of scholarship and professional practice in the field. But just 15 years ago, the idea of using visual media, mass media, and popular culture to expand awareness and knowledge was a great novelty at Harvard. Hurray for the digital revolution!

Renee Hobbs, Ed.D. ’85
Co-editor
Journal of Media Literacy Education
Professor, Temple University School of Communications and Theater
Philadelphia

AYN RAND

Jennifer Burns was correct that Ayn Rand’s philosophy of Objectivism has become “part of the warp and woof of American political culture,” but in more ways than most people know (Vita, November-December 2009, page 32). There are now at least 60 academic programs that involve reading Ayn Rand’s works. There are at least 155 professors who teach and study Rand’s works. The American Philosophical Association includes an Ayn Rand Society which will soon have its own journal. Both Cambridge University Press and Blackwell have published or have in press books or collections of essays on Rand’s ideas. Atlas Shrugged has sold over seven million copies and has shown dramatic increases in sales in the last few years. Rand was a cultural pariah in the 1960s, but her ideas are now on the verge of changing the culture itself.

Edwin A. Locke ’60
Westlake Village, Calif.

A puff-piece about Ayn Rand, a “philosopher” who deserves ever more ignoring? Absurd, especially with the full-scale economic and social experiment we’re still enduring thanks to only an approximation of her glorification of selfishness. And touting Alan Greenspan as an example of the success of her principles? Spare me.

Barry Goldstein ’64, A.M. ’69
Newtonville, Mass.

I attended Ayn Rand’s presentation at Harvard in October 1962. It was publicized in a quiet, almost embarrassed fashion and took place in an auditorium away from the center of things. One definitely got the sense that Harvard was not honoring Rand the philosopher so much as exhibiting her as a curious cultural phenomenon.

The hall was crowded. She gave her speech and then answered questions from the audience, which had been written down and passed in. She did not answer any question that directly challenged her assertions; her answers were mostly repetitions of what she had already said. Her exit, through the hall, was dramatic—a small, tender-eyed woman surrounded by a phalanx of young men in suits.

I had a hard time explaining Rand to a Harvard friend of the time, since putting her ideas into plain words, without the emotional drama of the novels, makes them sound idiotic, undeveloped, and cruel. Which they are, of course. Her talk, as I recall it, was little more than embroidery around her main theme, which is the justification of selfishness and the poisonous effects of societal obligations. That theme was not up for discussion.

She seemed to be there to get a little glow from the connection with Harvard. Most of us in the audience were there to see a star turn and, as in my case, to have her explain the difficulties with her theory. The star turn we definitely got; the explanation we definitely did not get. Whatever that night meant to her, I doubt that she considered it a success and certainly not, as Jennifer Burns called it, “a pinnacle in her career.”

Michel Choban ’66
Altadena, Calif.

PH.D. PROBLEMS APLENTY

I write to disagree, respectfully, with my colleague Louis Menand (“The Ph.D Problem,” November-December 2009, page 27), who writes: “that it takes longer to get a Ph.D. in the humanities than it does in the social or natural sciences...seems anomalous, since normally a dissertation in the humanities does not require extensive archival, field, or laboratory work.” What might be “normal” in his branch of the humanities is certainly not true in mine, the history of art, which, on account of the need to examine works of art in situ as well as to conduct related digging in...
Menand is correct when he states that the universities are overproducing Ph.D.s in relation to the availability of academic positions, but he fails to mention an important factor that led to this imbalance. In 1986 the mandatory retirement age for most professors was lifted, but not for professors. At the time, it was widely heralded that by the year 2000 thousands of positions would open up due to the retirement of an aging professoriate. But that did not happen because the requirement was soon lifted for professors. Many of them continued in their tenured positions, often with lowered enrollment in classes, but at the top salary ranges, a condition that limited the available spots for newly minted Ph.D.s.

Carol Delaney, M.T.S. ’76
Providence, R.I.

While it is advisable to diminish time-to-degree whenever possible, eight years in graduate school does not necessarily leave one “seriously overtrained” for a tenure-track job, and being a professor is not merely teaching at the college/university level, as Menand implies. Those of us in the profession know that, as dedicated as we are to our teaching, our efforts are also devoted to research and publishing, which demand time, focus, and funding that began during those important years which demand time, focus, and funding.

Many of us also mentor doctoral students, an intense commitment of time and energy that necessitates being well-entrenched in our disciplines—which would be impossible with only three years of graduate training.

My chosen specialization in contemporary Chinese theatre practice required me to become fluent in written and spoken Chinese; know the history and literature of western as well as non-western theatre; study Chinese history, literature, and politics; and im- (please turn to page 73)
A corollary to Louis Menand’s observation that the academic world tends to favor specialization and conformity is that, for all the talk about interdisciplinary studies, it shuns the scholar who is also a professional. Neither academia nor the outside world provides a job category for such hybrids as the physician-philosopher, the architect-sociologist, or (as in my case) the lawyer-historian. Professionals see no need to look askance at the colleague with a Ph.D., academics with distrust upon the scholar with professional credentials. Consequently, much potential for creative interdisciplinary work is wasted. In fact, in terms of employment opportunities, the sum of a professional degree and a Ph.D. may prove to be less than either of its parts.

Andrew Sorokowski, A.M. ’75
Rockville, Md.

AFRICA IMAGE
Glad to learn about undergraduates “Immersed in Africa” (November-December 2009, page 43), but surely the cover image is a gaffe: the adoring African woman looking up at the white guy a head taller than the surrounding blacks—and there were several other White Man’s Burden condescending touches.

Tom Blandy ’54, M.Arch. ’60
Troy, N.Y.

PRE-MED POSSIBILITIES
In response to Melanie Long’s “Post Pre-Med” (November-December 2009, page 63), I object to her characterization that “being pre-med is more than a set of course requirements: it’s a lifestyle.”

As an almost-graduate bound for medical school next fall, I think Long caricatures a pre-med student. Her generalization that a pre-med “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 a nursing home, and you should work in a research lab” reinforces the stereotype of the pre-meds who do things because they have to: getting an A in class, starting their own community-service project, or working in a lab. It ignores the fact that many pre-med students at Harvard have a lot of freedom in their academic and extracurricular activities. I have pre-med friends whose main passions are economics, health policy, and music. I concentrated in social studies and took a semester off to live and work in another country. I definitely did not feel constrained, and can still say that I did just fine (I hope!). Have hope, future pre-meds: life is not so bad.

Lydia Lo ’10
Cambridge

DON’T ASK, DON’T TELL
Without commenting on the ultimate merits of the issue, the assertion in the letter from Ted Gideonse ’96 that the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy is written into the Uniform Code of Military Justice is incorrect (November-December 2009, page 6). The statute setting out the policy, 10 U.S.C. 654, is contained in Chapter 37 of Title 10 of the United States Code, entitled “General Service Requirements,” and carries no criminal penalties. The Uniform Code is Chapter 47. The sodomy statute, 10 U.S.C. 925, which is Article 125 of the Uniform Code, is sexually neutral on its face, applying to both heterosexual and homosexual conduct. In 2005, the Bush admin-