are working with their Harvard faculty peers to solicit proposals for themed conferences (open to the public) and seminars (in which scholars from around the world, and often from different disciplines, assemble at RIAS to share their work with each other). The coming year’s offerings include a conference on gender and space in April, and another, on the history and future of the book, in October.

Speakers at the anniversary symposium used archival sources to illuminate not only how people saw Radcliffe—and what its leaders and its students wanted it to be—throughout its history, but also the changing role of women at Harvard. Reading from a Crimson article published her freshman year, journalist and cultural critic Susan Faludi ’81, RF ’09, demonstrated how differently women were seen on campus even then. Chronicling a meeting of the Harvard Dames, a group for graduate students’ wives, the article quoted the club’s president as saying it had been founded “to keep wives off their husbands’ backs during exam time.”

Much has changed, and Radcliffe’s graduates and the College itself were instrumental in those changes. Even as its work cuts across all disciplines, the institute has held onto its Radcliffe heritage through programming on women and gender and by selecting fellows who focus on these issues. Speaking at the symposium via video from Paris, Mary Maples Dunn (the institute’s interim dean in its earliest days, before Faust’s appointment) said, “While men aren’t excluded, women are still at the center.”

In some ways, status as an institute has added to Radcliffe’s value as a resource for those who study women’s issues. As an example, Dunn cited the expanded holdings of the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America: during the last decade, increased funding has enabled the library to acquire 23,400 printed volumes, some 8,700 audiovisual items, and 1,800 manuscripts. The library is also venturing into new media, devising ways to make personal archives in digital formats (e.g., e-mail) accessible to researchers; creating a website that showcases the contents of women’s travel diaries from the library collections; and archiving blogs that feature underrepresented voices and topics.

Supporting scholars and artists; emphasizing interdisciplinary collaboration; working at the leading edge of science; forging ahead into new media: this list of the institute’s top priorities matches closely the priorities of the University as a whole. This echo surely stems in part from the fact that in Faust, both entities have had a common leader. But RIAS, smaller and nimble, has in some respects leapt ahead of the University. As Fineberg put it: “Harvard has been moving to become more like Radcliffe.”

Read a longer account of the tenth-anniversary symposium, with links to other relevant articles and websites, at harvardmagazine.com/radcliffe-10th.

**THE UNDERGRADUATE**

**January Reading**

*by SPENCER LENFIELD ’12*

**T**here will be no intersession at Harvard College this year. Instead, due to calendar reform and budget shortfalls, we will have nearly the entire month of January as part of our winter break, rather than elective academic options as originally planned. This drew a surprising amount of criticism from undergraduates. Editorial upon ardent editorial ran in the *Crimson* lamenting the demise of “J-Term” and its promise of “structured programming.” Some 1,400 students petitioned feverishly to be allowed to stay on campus in January anyway; nearly all are being allowed to do so, for reasons ranging from sports to thesis research. Never have I heard so much opposition to an extended vacation.

The reality is that, no matter how much Harvard undergraduates complain about strictures and requirements in general, we actually tend to like being told what to do. We thrive on requirements, regulations, and “structured” programs of all sorts: after all, most of us got into Harvard by being very good at following them. It is consequently unsurprising that many students balked at having to occupy themselves for an entire month, preferring instead that the University take on that responsibility. Yet all is not lost. Most undergraduates also got in by having a strong self-motivated streak, and will figure out
something to do with January. Perhaps that will even involve a book.

The “J-term” reaction illuminates aspects of another absence from the “structured programming” at Harvard: a “Great Books” curriculum, whether mandatory, like Columbia’s Core, or elective, like Yale’s Directed Studies. The lack of such an option occasions much contention and exasperation among both students and faculty whenever it arises. Faculty members tend to regret the failure to provide a comprehensive, “foundational text”-based course of study for willing students, the loss of a common body of knowledge, and the consequent difficulty of fostering a shared academic discourse among undergraduates. Students mention all the same reasons, but usually only after something else: a sense of what one should read, but hasn’t.

“I’ve never read Zola,” I had to admit to a friend over dessert when she brought up L’Assommoir. If only the list stopped there. Among hundreds (thousands?) of other “great books,” I’ve also never read Moby-Dick, Things Fall Apart, Middlemarch, or anything by Hume, Hardy, Aquinas, or Mann. I like to think that I’m fairly well-read for a sophomore History and Literature concentrator, but the breadth of the “what one should read” is daunting enough to humble even the most self-consciously lettered undergraduate. No matter how much you’ve read, there will always be something that you haven’t quite gotten to yet. It’s only natural for students to have developed different interests and read different books, and to take different courses with different reading lists while they’re at Harvard. As a result, conversations about literature and ideas between undergraduates are often marked by a working-out of common ground. “Have you read...?” “No, I haven’t, but you might be interested in...” Consequently, you quickly acquire a massive reading list of recommendations from friends, professors, and your own curiosity. I doubt that having a great books program would change this much, nor should it: sharing idiosyncrasies as growing readers and thinkers is an essential part of that budding intellectual discourse. But in the absence of a more uniform curriculum experience, these discussions constitute a crucial part of the construction of one’s education, rather than an auxiliary to it. They become the means by which we identify what we should read.

This sensation of vast bookshelves’ worth of unread masterpieces stretching onward drives most if not all of the students of literature and ideas at Harvard (as elsewhere) to study what they study. This urge combines great pleasure in reading these texts with a strong sense that not doing so is not only an aesthetic loss, but also a failure to educate oneself properly. It is not merely that there is always something left that you haven’t read, which is unremarkable in itself, but rather the notion that there is always something left that you should read, and that your education and your mind will be unfinished until the obligation presented by that unread text has been fulfilled.

This is the whole reason why anyone studies literature in college, though. For one thing, college should expose you to things you haven’t read before. Yet beyond that, it should teach you that you can’t read it all in just four years, or even in a lifetime. No one has ever succeeded in reading it all, even when “all” was a lot smaller and more clearly defined than it is now. Undergraduate literary studies should aim to create well-read students while simultaneously revealing “well-read” as a hollow epithet. There is no finish line after which you suddenly become well-read; instead, to be well-read is to constantly want to read more.

Too often, the greatest contention about what to teach in great-books-type courses arises from the assumption that they will define once and for all what is “great,” and too often their advocates assume (implicitly, at least) that such courses will offer some permanent basis for the greatness, or at least importance, of certain ideas and art. Such a politically fraught discussion, among other reasons, makes it seem unlikely that a great-books sort of program would appear at Harvard anytime soon.

In the meantime, the students who would be most likely to follow such a curriculum manage to improvise some version thereof with the resources at hand. Certain classes are renowned for their sweeping, Great Books-ish approach. During shopping period this fall, it seemed as though every other person I knew was taking Social Studies 10, the survey covering social theory from, roughly, Hobbes to Marx. The classes that tackle 2,000 pages of reading in a semester, spanning centu-
pies and continents—those are what students take in place of a more clearly delineated course of study.

If we have such courses, though, what is ultimately missing? I brought this up with two friends who’d taken a popular freshman seminar in Hellenic literature, “Foundation Texts of the West,” last year. They both told me, “It helps to have a professor say, ‘Look, we don’t have time to read the entire Western canon, so I’m going to choose these salient examples, and we’ll learn these.’” I agree—mostly. It is important to have a good professor who can help lead you through key works, using them to teach you how to think and read more deeply.

But it is equally important to keep those “salient examples” in perspective. Outside the debate over what should be taught, the goal of a great-books program should be to urge students to keep reading beyond the program, and to teach them how to do so. It should acknowledge its own incompleteness, urging students to take it as merely introductory, rather than as some comprehensive experience. “Great Books,” suggesting a monolithic but coherent undertaking, is an unfortunate name; perhaps a better title would be “Some Great Books.” And the goal of a Some Great Books curriculum should be, metaphorically if not literally, to teach students what to do with their January off.

Classes are marvelous things; professors are terrific people; classmates always manage to make one think harder. But the goal of coursework is not to teach students how to learn solely in a classroom, any more than it is to teach them how to think solely in a classroom. A good class teaches students how to learn independently of “structured programming,” and to realize that simply following the rules and earning accolades does not constitute learning at all. A great-books education in particular—and a liberal-arts education in general—should teach students how to use their time, liberty, and independence creatively and intelligently. (Isn’t that what “liberal arts” really meant?) It should emphasize that reading in class is only training for the reading done outside class; it should show how to begin to develop and progress along a personal reading list in a mature and meaningful way. It should teach students to value a January off infinitely more than a January in a program, to see free time not as enforced boredom but irreplaceable opportunity.

To be fair, I can understand how students, especially in the sciences, would love, or may need, to be able to use Harvard’s research resources for a month. The general point remains the same, though, and a great-books program in particular should give its students only one reason why they’d want to come back to Harvard in January: to use the library.

The initial planning for “J-Term”—with talk of instituting month-long elective classes or study trips abroad—is gone for now. Perhaps, when the College is feeling a bit more secure financially, it will resurrect those plans. Personally, though, I like to think that Harvard students by then will have become so used to spending January on their own terms that no one will want to come back. January will become the time when one can finally tackle Hard Times or Das Kapital, and the clearest sign that a Harvard education is working will be an empty, snowy Yard.

Berta Greenwald Ledecky Undergraduate Fellow
Spencer Lenfield ’12 expects to spend his January off finishing War and Peace.

SPRINTS

The brothers Biega planned it this way: all three are skating for the Crimson.

Sibbling rivalry can inspire, but sibling unanimity has some impressive virtues, too. Consider the brothers Biega—Alex ’10, Michael ’11, and Danny ’13—of Harvard’s ice hockey team. All hail from Montreal, Canada, and have been playing sports together most of their lives: ice hockey, soccer, and rowing, for example, at Salisbury School, a small, all-male private school in Connecticut with some formidable athletic teams. The Biega triumvirate played on New England championship hockey teams there—Michael’s goal off a rebound from Alex’s shot won the school’s first title—with Alex and Danny chosen as captains and

Alex and Michael successively honored as Salisbury’s athlete of the year. All three hope to play professionally in the National Hockey League (NHL). Yet the brethren aren’t clones: Alex and Danny are defensemen, and Michael’s a forward.

Danny’s new to Cambridge, but his older sibs have done damage on the intercollegiate ice for years now. Alex, this year’s Harvard captain, was named Harvard’s most valuable player last year, when he made the New England All-Star Team and the all-Ivy first team. With four goals and 16 assists, his 20 points were second on the squad, no mean feat for a defenseman. “With my stature,” he explains, laughing—at five feet 11 and 195 pounds, Alex is small for a defender—“you have to be an offense-minded defenseman.” He is the first defenseman in more than 20 years to lead Harvard in assists. (Three years ago, the Buffalo Sabres of the NHL drafted him in the fifth round; he’ll join that organization after college.)

As a freshman, Michael notched a hat trick against Yale, and last year, with six goals and 11 assists for 17 points, was right behind Alex as the team’s third-leading scorer. (Forward Doug Rogers ’10, at 8-13-21, led the Crimson.) Michael and Alex joined forces on a power-play unit that was best in the Eastern College Athletic Con-