The deal was not hard to fulfill. But when the end of term rolled round, I had serious reckoning to do. My grades had plummeted. Instead of straight As, I found a motley crew of letters and symbols that could not hide the ugly arc of a C-. I was mortified. I was angry. I was disappointed that I failed my work ethic. And worst, I thought I’d failed my parents. Financial woes had hit our family at the worst time. My mum later told me she got down on her knees and prayed in thanksgiving the day I got into Harvard because she wasn’t sure how we’d ever manage to send me to a less generous college. And here was I, in my first semester, disrespecting both her sacrifices and Harvard’s generosity, squandering a semester in lazy “self-exploration” rather than working hard. I was ashamed. And yet… And yet I was actually happy. I don’t think I cried all semester. I was more relaxed and therefore kinder. I had more energy to be a good friend and daughter. As the sting of that first transcript faded, I looked back on what I had done with my semester, and I acknowledged its worth. Before, I had thought not working my hardest selfish. Now I saw it was the other way around. By taking away time from being perfect, I built in time for others.

During the spring, the life of one of my closest Harvard friends ground to a halt. Ironically, she had long been my best model of how to lead a relaxed, carefree, humane, balanced lifestyle. She is someone with whom I’d lingered in dining halls, with whom I whiled away hours on adventures. She seemed to have figured out how to balance doing well and living well, and I envied what I saw as her careless grace. Imagine my shock, then, when a panic attack sent this friend into a days-long stint in the infirmary, revealing a struggle with depression and anxiety about which I’d been almost wholly unaware. As I made room in my schedule to visit her, help care for her, and be the good friend she needed, I considered two things. First, I thought about how many other Harvard students might be going through the same sorts of crises with the rest of us entirely oblivious. I wondered how many of those “super-students” were secretly suffering. And, second, I thought about my own letting-go of perfectionism. If I hadn’t done so, I could not have been a good friend to my friend at such a critical time. I would not have had the perspective to help. And I would not have been able to put school work on hold to do so.

Last winter, I had wondered how I could ever reconcile my guilt at having relaxed my work ethic with my certainty that doing so had allowed me to grow in other ways. I had worried about where my duty lay: to Harvard, for offering me an education and paying a great share of its cost; to my parents, for raising me, guiding me, and making sacrifices for me; or to myself, maybe more in need of reflection and friendship than a spotless transcript. Now I realize I was worrying about the wrong “duty.” My duty to the world isn’t to be perfect. It is to take care of myself as best I can so I can give back to the world the love and care it has given to me. If slacking off was what I needed to make myself happy and available to help others, then this decision reflected no disrespect for my parents, for Harvard, or for my own work ethic.

My friend is doing much better now. I think I cried all semester. I was more relaxed and therefore kinder. I had more energy to be a good friend and daughter. As the sting of that first transcript faded, I looked back on what I had done with my semester, and I acknowledged its worth. Before, I had thought not working my hardest selfish. Now I saw it was the other way around. By taking away time from being perfect, I built in time for others.

My duty to the world isn’t to be perfect. It is to take care of myself.

Berta Greenwald Ledecky Undergraduate Fellow
Isabel W. Ruane ’14 is looking forward to spending another summer teaching and learning from her Camp Onaway girls.

SPOROS

Kiwi Crewmen

The O’Connor brothers’ rowing careers span 9,000 miles.

The lineup of the Harvard men’s heavyweight varsity eight this year represents much of the English-speaking world: a coxswain and two oarsmen (including captain Michael DiSanto ’12) from the United States; two English oarsmen (including stroke Patrick Lapage ’12), one Australian, one Scotsman, and two brothers from New Zealand, Sam O’Connor ’12 and James O’Connor ’13. Why come halfway around the world to row for Harvard? “There’s a unique and pretty awesome system [in the United States] of college sports,” says James. “Back home, at some point you have to ask yourself, ‘Do I want to row really seriously, or do I want to go to university and study?’ Here, you don’t have to make that choice.”

For the brothers O’Connor, the 9,000-mile voyage seems to have been worthwhile. Sam received his S.B. in engineering sciences in May; James, a psychology concentrator with a secondary field in economics, expects his degree next spring. Sam rowed on the 2010 crew that went 7-1, were Eastern Sprints champions, came fourth at the Intercollegiate Rowing Association (IRA) regatta that decides the national champion, and won the Ladies’ Plate at England’s Henley Royal Regatta. He missed the 2011 season due to injury (he was hit by a car while home for Christ-
Lightweight Rowing
The men's varsity eight won the national championship at the Intercollegiate Rowing Association (IRA) regatta in Camden, edging Dartmouth by just under a second and setting a course record of 5:33.059. The lights' first national title since 2003 capped an undefeated season that also saw the Crimson win the Eastern Sprints, regatta in Worcester, placing them atop Eastern collegiate rowing and the Ivy League for the second straight year.

The women's varsity lights took bronze, behind Stanford and Bucknell, at the IRA regatta.

Softball

At the NCAA tournament in Seattle, Brown took a 2-0 loss to Washington in the regional opener, but bounced back to strike out 12 as the Crimson posted its first NCAA tournament win in 14 years, a 3-2 victory over Maryland in eight innings. She then shut out Texas Tech, 2-0, before Washington again defeated Brown and the Crimson, 4-0, in the final.

Sports Wrap
mas break), but James pulled an oar that year for the formidable Harvard eight that was undefeated in dual meets, won the Eastern Sprints, took silver at the IRAs, and reached the semifinals in the Ladies' Plate. This year, rowing together in the varsity, they won the Head of the Charles last fall, enjoyed an undefeated dual-meet season, and were nipped by 0.3 seconds by Brown at the Sprints. Their varsity crews have been undefeated in the Harvard-Yale regatta; the Eli haven't won the four-mile race in New London since 2007.

They aren't big athletes: Sam is six feet one and 190 pounds, James six two and around 185. Sam typically rows in the number-four seat, part of the powerful "engine room" that occupies the middle four seats of an eight-man crew. James is a bowman, sitting in the number-one seat, where the thwart is narrower and lighter weight is helpful: "Boats tend to lift up at the bow—you don't want to sink the bow," he explains. The all-important balance of the shell is a bit more sensitive there, and with all the other oarsmen in full view, "you can see more of what's going on," he notes: the bowman can occasionally report useful observations to his crewmates on what their blades are doing. Sam has no preference as to where he rows—he was at number six for some races this year—and simply mentions, with a grin, "You work pretty hard, and your legs hurt pretty badly, no matter where you sit."

The brothers grew up in Christchurch, a city of about 375,000 in a country where sheep "outnumber humans eight to one," according to James. Their
“They saw what the older O’Connor could do, and thought they’d take the little one as well.”

mother, Jill, a Pilates maven, coordinates programs at a YMCA; father Peter teaches physics and coaches rowing, soccer, and rugby at Christ’s College, a private school. Older sisters Kristi (who rowed on a national-championship eight in high school), and Becky (an accomplished triathlete) also play sports. Both boys rowed for successful crews during their high-school years and made the New Zealand national junior team. “They saw what the older O’Connor could do,” James explains, “and thought they’d take the little one as well.”

Both were on the New Zealand eight that won the World Junior Championships at Amsterdam in 2006. Some American coaches were there, though the New Zealand mentors discouraged their athletes from speaking to them—hoping, sensibly enough, to keep their best oarsmen at home. Nonetheless, a rowing coach at Cambridge University, a friend of the O’Connors’ father, put them in touch with their Harvard freshman coach (now associate head coach) Bill Manning, and both brothers had successful careers rowing in Manning’s freshman boats.

John West, M.B.A. ’95, golfs with his two young sons, Jack and Danny. “They love it, but they wouldn’t sit and watch a four-hour game on TV,” he reports. “Yet if you give them clips with the game’s highlights and interviews with players, then they will.” The same goes for football, West notes. “It’s a complicated game that many kids cannot sit through. But if you condense the content and make it fast-paced, with graphics and stats on the side of the screen, and interviews with players, and audio—more going on for kids, who are now wired to multitask—then they will be engaged.”

At least that’s what West and other co-founders of The Whistle are betting on. The new company promotes spectator sports to children from six to 14 through content that is reconstructed to make it more digestible, and then distributed through the media platforms that young people frequent far more than adults do, including YouTube, major gaming consoles, and apps. The Whistle’s own highly interactive website is being created by kids with input from adults; it is up in a beta version that will be fully available in September. The company is also preparing a half-hour cable show, scheduled to start in September, for the NBC Sports Network.

“Kids are not watching television in the traditional way,” notes West, an entrepreneur who has founded and sold two other companies, and was largely influenced by Grown Up Digital, by Don Tapscott (now on The Whistle’s advisory board). “To them, the media are like air: they want it when and how and where they are.” Kids between eight and 18 are spending more than seven hours a day on screens, often using more than one media platform at a time. Moreover, he says, the attention span of the average 10-year-old is only about seven minutes.

Those factors, he points out, prime those 42 million American children between six and 14—70 percent of whom are engaged in organized sports—for exactly what The Whistle has to offer: a mix of sports instruction, behind-the-scenes vignettes and kid interviews with pro and Olympic athletes, a bloopers segment, games and cartoons about sports, contests, sports history, news, statistics, and user-created programming. Kids can send in their own sports videos, for example, as well as track and promote their real-world and online sports achievements through the website. “We are making authentic sports content widely accessible, customizable, and shareable, all of which kids want,” West says. “Ultimately, what we’re creating is a community for the next generation of sports fans”—one without the R-rated movie trailers and ads selling alcohol and prescription drugs typically seen with adult sports programs.

It’s potentially a lucrative proposition. Sports Illustrated has a popular magazine for the younger set, along with a website, but no other digital or cable programming. Nickelodeon’s Games and Sports for Kids cable network channel came and went. “ESPN is dipping into the high-school-sports scene with programming and they do televise the Little League World Series,” West adds. But nobody has captured this market before. What makes West think The Whistle will succeed now? “I’m an entrepreneur and can take

ALUMNI

The Whistle

An entrepreneur’s multimedia ESPN for kids, “the next generation of sports fans”