Despite having spent countless hours on the Internet, there is only one Google search I distinctly remember making. One day, when I lived at home in Ireland, I was so utterly and completely fed up with school that I typed “summer abroad” into Google and pressed Enter. I was hoping that a beautiful montage of interesting language programs and exotic backpacking destinations would flood my computer screen, transporting me, if only momentarily, away from the gloomy Irish day and my debilitating boredom into a world of beautiful colors and accented whispers. No such montage materialized.

Instead, something quite different appeared as the first search result. I clicked it. I read. I thought about what I read. The program described sounded good. I applied. I went. I loved it. I returned home, grew more maddened by the Irish educational system, decided to leave it, and left. And, in leaving, changed the entire trajectory of my life.

Taking random classes in self-defense, drama, and first aid, selling charity badges to strangers on the streets of Dublin, and very little else that I can remember.

The general idea of the Year is for students to escape from the overly exam-focused system: in Ireland, our entire pre-collegiate education boils down to the preparation for, and results of, two sets of examinations—the first, when you’re about 14, the second, at the very end of senior year. The results of the second set are the only criteria for college admissions. Everything else is just a test run; your whole secondary-school education comes down to two weeks of exams at the very end. No essays, no extracurriculars, no school transcripts, no recommendations—just making State Examination grades. The End is all that matters. You are merely an examination number, with no face and no background, just a
The freedom we received was only technical—we were given computers with which to occupy the majority of our days. Classes mostly consisted of free time: free packaged films, “educational” things on your computer, or mindlessly watching “educational” things. We had to stay in class, aimlessly “researching” for different worlds. But this time, I had a weapon to fend off the straitjacketed system. I knew what to expect. I didn’t know anything about the American college system, didn’t know what liberal arts meant, had no notion of applying to schools here, and no family or friends in America to explain anything to me. All I had was the names of my two classes, a mind full of a deficit of interest, freshly harvested from Transition Year, and a bank account that was almost empty of four years of my time. Luckily, my post-transitioned mind was in the perfect state to be filled, and the bottled-up time I had been saving was perfectly spilled right back into my head—just like water raining back down into a mirroring sea. Classes, instead of being full of answers, were full of questions. And, for the first time, I discovered that I suited questions a lot better than I suited answers. My time, in being reflectively spent, was set free—in and of itself.

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definite form of legitimacy there can be. It just clicked for me, and has been clicking ever since.

Now, as a rising junior, I’m a proctor for Harvard Summer School. I’m the primary question-answering resource for 13 rising high-school seniors. Each of them is older than I was when I first came here, one Transition Year old and completely clueless about all things American. They’re full of questions—mostly about where classes are and what Harvard life is like. They all seem a lot harder working, and immensely less shy, than I was when I was where they are. They know a lot more about the college application process than I do, and seem a lot surer about what they want. I can answer some of their questions, though, and can show them where some things are and how some things work.

My favorite question I’ve been asked so far was asked of me on one of the very first days of the Summer School term. My co-proctor and I walked some students from our hall to dinner in Annenberg, where we sat together after navigating the still-confused crowd in the servery. I can’t remember many details of the table conversation. But, I do remember looking down at my glass of water and seeing the reflection of the vaulted ceiling dancing across the liquid’s surface. I looked up as one of my students, holding his own empty glass in his hand, excitedly asked, “Do we get free refills?”

“Yes,” I answered. “The refills are most definitely free.”

Berta Greenwald Ledecky Undergraduate Fellow
Cherone Duggan ’14 is passionately committed to her main curricular and extracurricular activity: unstructured time.

SPORTS

It’s Up—It’s Good!

Placekicker David Mothander explains how to split the uprights.

THE PLAY that shone the brightest spotlight on David Mothander ’14 hardly typifies what he does on a football field. Last November, with Harvard leading Yale, 14-7, in the second quarter, the Crimson and their placekicker, Mothander, lined up for a 22-yard field-goal attempt from the Yale 12. Instead, with a perfectly executed fake, holder Colton Chapple ’13 flipped the ball to Mothander, who sprinted unopposed into the end zone. Touchdown, Harvard.

Mothander (mo-tan-der) is very comfortable with the football in his hands: he played quarterback at St. Margaret’s Episcopal School in San Juan Capistrano, California. Quarterbacks are often the best all-around athletes on their high-school teams, and many play other positions on college varsities. “I think there were eight high-school quarterbacks in [my Harvard] class alone,” he says.

At six feet, three inches, Mothander’s a bit taller than most placekickers, and his experience as a goalie in high-school soccer (he also lettered in baseball as a pitcher and shortstop) may have taught him how to put leg into the ball. Goalkeepers take plenty of goal kicks—the object, naturally, being to send the ball as far as possible from the goal and out of the opponents’ reach—to hit it “long and high,” as Mothander says. Very similar, in other words, to a kickoff.

For many decades, placekickers weren’t specialists: position players moonlighted at the task. Gino Cappelletti of the Boston (now New England) Patriots, for example, was a wide receiver, and the legendary Lou “the Toe” Groza of the Cleveland Browns was an offensive tackle. Groza converted 88.5 percent of his attempts in 1953, at a time when most National Football League (NFL) teams missed more than half their field goals.

In the 1960s, accuracy rose markedly with the advent of “soccer-style” kicking, which a Budapest-born Cornell graduate, Pete Gogolak, brought to American football. He kicked for the Buffalo Bills and then the New York Giants (becoming their all-time leading scorer) from 1964 until 1974.

One of Lou Groza’s kicking shoes resides in the Smithsonian, but no NFL rule requires that kickers wear a shoe at all. Rich Karlis, who kicked mostly for the Denver Broncos, was the last of the barefoot placekickers; he ended his career with the Vikings and Lions, retiring in 1990.

Photographs by Jim Harrison

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David Mothander

Those who watch the National Football League get used to seeing placekickers convert 80 percent or more of their field-goal attempts despite hitting balls spotted 40-plus and even 50-plus yards from the goalposts. Placekicking in the college game is a considerably less routine matter, but Mothander has been a solid performer. Last season, he converted six of eight attempts and hit a long one of 42 yards. He also aced 48 of 50 extra points. As a fresh-

Placekicking:
A Brief History

In its early years, American football used a round ball that players would hold in their hands, drop to the ground, and kick on a low bounce. With the advent of the forward pass, the ball took on its current elliptical shape, making it easier to throw—but causing unpredictable bounces. So the drop kick gave way to placekicking, with tees (for kickoffs) and holders (for field goals and extra points).