American Competitiveness

Four key points were made in “Can America Compete?” (September-October, page 26). First, we have “an incoherent, complex corporate tax code...” For instance, taxing “carried interest” as capital rather than as labor income should be reversed.

Second, labor savings of as much as 100 to 1 virtually mandated production outsourcing, but side-by-side engineering went along with it, leaving the U.S. inexper in many of the very technologies it had invented. “Making things” requires preserving “innovative capability over time.”

Third, the “evaluation and compensation of managers and investors” has been given over to financial markets. False rewards encourage unethical behavior.

Fourth, as a society “we somehow tolerate persistent high unemployment, 30 years of stagnating wages and growing wage inequality, two decades of declining job satisfaction and loss of pension and retirement benefits...” The view of shareholder value as corporations’ primary objective is dominant.

I suggest we also consider that the “Great Recession” was a financial debacle for which proper responsibility has not been assigned nor conditions ameliorated. Fundamental campaign finance restrictions can bring a virtual stop to political warfare where today any “loss” is childishly taken as defeat. With

Letters
You never actually own a Patek Philippe. You merely take care of it for the next generation.
the government’s help, high unemployment and social discontent can be treated.

Finally, who but the business schools send their best and brightest into a finance industry that constitutes a largely uncreative 14 percent of our GNP and which currently views dollars as the be-all and end-all of life on this planet?

ALAN O. DANN ’55
Brattleboro, Vt.

I showed this compilation of interviews to friends from across the political spectrum, and most of them were enraged. That suggests your experts must be onto something. Only one quibble: in the interest of appearing objective, said experts dance around the question of why our politics are dysfunctional. This feeds the myth that blame for the current polarization is equally shared. Not so. “Politics as war” today is the fault of the right. I know, because I was excommunicated from local Republican party activities for repeatedly objecting to our increasing extremism. As all of your experts say or imply, a sustainable economy needs both planting and harvesting to work. The GOP has been taken over by those who only want to harvest, without any further thought to planting.

CHARLES HSU ’79
Shanghai

I wonder if the cover photo was chosen for some hidden meaning? Yes, of course, the first vehicle in line is a 1959 Ford Galaxie 500 four-door hardtop. But the second and third cars in line are 1959 Edsels!! Note the center bump on the raised hood and the grille texture of the second car through the first car’s back window. Note the open passenger door on the third vehicle...it has an Edsel exterior body side molding.

Conspiracy theorists may have a fun time figuring out if you intended multiple meanings—and if so, what they are. Yes, I did work for Ford starting in 1963 and had a most enjoyable 31-year career there, including a two-year stint in Boston attending HBS.

WILLIAM L. (BILL) KATH, M.B.A. ’69
Newmarket, N.H.

Editor’s note: No multiple meanings intended, despite the unfortunate fate of the Edsel.

FREE WILL
The capacities of human consciousness, of which will power is only one, are no longer the province of philosophy or
even psychology but predominantly neuroscience. The article (“Two Steps to Free Will,” September-October, page 9) doesn’t even mention neuroscience or consider any of its findings from the past 20 years. This is probably a tendentious omission by the author to make his argument more persuasive. It actually makes it less so. The other sleight-of-hand sophistry here is a facile juxtaposition of Darwinian evolution and William James’s understanding of its interaction with genetics. Quite misleading. James died in 1910; the modern synthesis of Darwinism and Mendelian genetics didn’t take place until 1942.

Mark Belson, A.M. ’78
Overland Park, Kan.

The explanation of William James’s understanding of free will given in your article invokes a “first chance, then choice” explanation which does little to clarify the matter for me. I had heard a different account of James’s thinking on this subject. A path I took in my days as a student through the Cambridge Common used to lead to the statue of Abraham Lincoln. It split into two paths going around the statue, rejoining into a single path behind it. James apparently used to walk the same route, and is said to have remarked that the choice of whether to take the right or the left path around the statue was the only case of pure free will he was aware of. That suggests that he felt that determinism was operational in most cases, but that a totally inconsequential choice might be considered “free.” The last time I was in Cambridge I was saddened to see that the path had been rerouted, and that now there was only one way to get around the statue. A marvelous historical site had been destroyed!

Barbara R. (Berman) Bergmann, Ph.D. ’58
Washington, D.C.

Design Competitions, Clients

Had Craig Lambert done some research before writing about the shortcomings of architectural competitions (“Architecture in Concert,” September-October, page 46), he would have learned that current competitions include interactions between the architect and client. Having led more than 60 competitions throughout the United States and abroad during the past 20 years, I can verify that the process Lambert describes has been replaced with a more interactive one.

Bill Liskamm, M. Arch. ’56
San Rafael, Calif.

Construction and Climate

We were interested to see House renewal discussed (“Designating Dunster,” September-October, page 65), but disappointed to see no reference to the impending risk of sea-level rise. Some Houses are only 9 or 10 feet above current mean sea level and are protected by a Charles River dam only 12.5 feet tall. Tides as high as 12 feet and storm surges of up to an additional five feet already place development along the Charles at occasional risk.

Endowed with scientists at the forefront in anticipating global sea rise and its effects upon Cambridge, Harvard should apply this insight to reduce risk to its facilities and operations. Upgrading should be accompanied by studies of rising water vulnerabilities and mitigation approaches. Harvard should implement smart designs in areas it controls,
but some actions will require metro-wide cooperation that Harvard should spearhead. Responsible stewardship requires broadening this effort to all possibly endangered Harvard facilities, and Harvard should build major new developments only at locations safely removed from sea-level rise.

Arthur L. Boright ’61
Harstine Island, Wash.

Charles Alan Boright ’68
Middlesex, Vt.

Nathan Shenk-Boright ’03
Olympia, Wash.

CHEATING INVESTIGATION
I am shocked and saddened to read of cheating by a large number of students at Harvard (see page 40)! But after reading that it involved a class about Congress, I am less surprised. Perhaps the students are merely emulating their elected officials.

John Hutchinson ’69, M.D. ’73
Seattle

I blame the professors who must have given an exam that could lead to cheating by their students. When I taught at the undergraduate and graduate levels, I told my students they could bring anything they thought might help into the exam, but it wouldn’t help. My exam would require them to think, not just regurgitate what I had told them in class. Of course, I proctored the exam myself. If anyone had copied, the similar exam papers would have revealed the lack of independent thought. In that case, expulsion at least for a year might be appropriate.

Also, I would have thought that a take-home exam should have encouraged cooperation and sharing of thoughts. If 125 more or less identical exam papers were turned in, then I would say the students are sending a message of disdain to their professors.

“I am shocked and saddened to read of cheating by a large number of students at Harvard (see page 40)! But after reading that it involved a class about Congress, I am less surprised. Perhaps the students are merely emulating their elected officials.

John Hutchinson ’69, M.D. ’73
Seattle

SPEAK UP, PLEASE
Harvard Magazine welcomes letters on its contents. Please write to “Letters,” Harvard Magazine, 7 Ware Street, Cambridge 02138, send comments by e-mail to yourturn@harvard.edu, use our website, www.harvardmagazine.com, or fax us at 617-495-0324. Letters may be edited to fit the available space.

“Cheating” it may be, but the professors should be ashamed of the situation.

Richard S. Greeley, S.B. ’49
St. Davids, Pa.

GLOBAL (HARVARD) LIMITS
From Drew Faust’s “Toward a Global Strategy for Harvard” (September-October, page 75): which five countries don’t have alumni?

Viveca Gardner ’88
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Editor’s note: As of 2010, says the president’s office, Djibouti, East Timor, Gabon, Palau, and Tuvalu were the only five lacking an alum.

AMPLIFICATIONS
The appointment of Paul Guyer ’69, Ph.D. ’74, as the inaugural Nelson professor of humanities and philosophy at Brown, reported in Brevia (July-August, page 53), inadvertently omitted his Harvard degrees.

Book reviewer Andrea Louise Campbell ’88 suffered a typographical error in her byline (September-October, page 22). She was identified correctly in the author note on page 24; our apologies.
I Choose Harvard...

Stephanie (Formica) Connaughton ’87

Whether she’s designing shaving products, yoga mats, or home interiors, Stephanie (Formica) Connaughton ’87 loves the collaborative process. “Innovation involves bringing together different talents and perspectives to create new things,” she says. “It’s great to help build that at Harvard.” To mark her recent 25th Reunion, she created the Stephanie F. Connaughton Innovation Fund to support design-related teaching and research in Harvard’s School of Engineering and Applied Sciences (SEAS). Her gift will name Pierce Hall 301 (seen above) as the Connaughton Room, a new flexible classroom that promotes teamwork through multiple whiteboards and movable tables. “Collaboration is about the mind, but space matters,” says Connaughton, a former economics concentrator from Eliot House who lives in Brookline, Mass., and has spent many years in consumer-product development. “Pierce 301 hit a chord because it reminded me of the team dynamic that I love.”

To read more, please visit www.alumni.harvard.edu/stories/connaughton

Asami Ishimaru ’79, MBA ’83

As a private equity investor, Asami Ishimaru ’79, MBA ’83 of New York City is always on the lookout for emerging companies that use innovative technology to solve problems. So after she heard Cherry A. Murray, dean of Harvard’s School of Engineering and Applied Sciences (SEAS), speak about the School’s mission to promote innovation and instill technology literacy among students, she decided to establish a Dean’s Innovation Fund to bolster forward-thinking teaching and research at SEAS. “Dean Murray is building a world-class engineering school,” notes Ishimaru, who concentrated in economics, lived in Currier House, and went on to Harvard Business School and a career in finance. “For SEAS to be relevant, it has to evolve continuously. That requires substantial resources and leadership.”

To read more, please visit www.alumni.harvard.edu/stories/ishimaru

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