The first time Smart professor of law Jon Hanson lived on wheels, he was managing a restaurant and sharing a trailer with his high-school sweetheart, Kathleen. The newlyweds had bought the trailer cheap and persuaded their shop teacher to let them fix it up during senior year. Neither planned to attend college. That changed after Hanson’s father died, when something jumped out among his father’s few possessions: his books. Applying to Rice on Kathleen’s suggestion, Hanson got in and soared, earning a fellowship for research in Europe. (They traveled in a camper van there, later taking their three kids across America in an RV.) Then on to Yale—he to the law school, and Kathleen to the college. By Hanson’s “2L” year, he’d coauthored his first law-review article, and was off to the scholarly races. At Harvard, Hanson stands out for connecting law to the mind sciences and for his approach to legal education. Teaching 1L torts, the three-time Sacks-Freund teaching-award winner bucks the case-churning norm to spend the semester drilling down on a handful—tracing how each case reveals a “web” of factors that have perpetuated inequities through the years. Last year, with Jacob Lipton, J.D. ’14, he launched the “Systemic Justice Project” and two accompanying courses to allow students to plumb the sources of law-related social problems—and tackle problems of their own choosing. Students adore him. “Once you’ve encountered him, you cannot leave without being impacted,” says Ariel Eckblad, L ’16. So Hanson hopes. Law school, he argues, “ought to be a place” where students study the problems that brought them there—and learn “the tools to take those problems on.”

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These deeply disturbing survey results must spur us to an even more intent focus on the problem of sexual assault. That means not just how we talk to one another about it, not just what we say in official pronouncements, but how we actually treat one another and live our lives together. All of us share the obligation to create and sustain a community of which we can all be proud, a community whose bedrock is mutual respect and concern for one another. Sexual assault is intolerable, and we owe it to one another to confront it openly, purposefully, and effectively. This is our problem.

The problem of sexual assault was brought to the forefront of discussion on campus when The Harvard Crimson published “a long, anonymous, first-person account of an unwanted sexual encounter” (see “Addressing Sexual Assaults,” July-August 2014, page 23). Faust announced the formation of the task force headed by Hyman a few days later. Because only a fraction of sexual assaults are reported, surveys have come to be seen as a key way to learn more about the problem. Universities—reacting to government pressure and the threat of lawsuits brought by students under Title IX (the federal law that prevents discrimination on the basis of sex)—are seeking more data so that they can figure out ways to increase reporting, prevent sexual misconduct, and comply with the law.

At Harvard, the data point to the College as the locus of the worst of the problem: the University, including the graduate and professional schools, had a lower rate of nonconsensual sexual contact than the AAU average in the eight months preceding the survey, but the rate at the College was higher. And as noted, undergraduate women were less likely to believe that Harvard officials would take a report seriously, conduct a fair investigation, or take action against an offender. Rakesh Khurana, just starting his second year as dean of Harvard College, spoke in an interview of a “trust deficit,” the need to give “Harvard the institution” a human face, and to bring “moral and emotional urgency” to solving a problem that involves, at root, “a human being who has been deeply impacted.”

Lack of confidence in officials is matched, University-wide, by a paucity of...