Cambridge 02138

“Cowboy doctors,” Gen Ed, Corita Kent

BASE OF THE PYRAMID
Thank you for the important article about impact investing (“Business for the Other Billions,” September-October, page 31), which offers perhaps the best hope for alleviating poverty, and should appeal to anyone at any point along the political and ideological spectrum. A friend involved and influential in impact investing gave me further examples of such entrepreneurial ventures: in one, purified water can be obtained at low cost by running an electric current through salt water (electrochlorination), and then distributed to rural villagers for a few pennies per gallon, generating a profit and solving a pervasive problem. Other enterprises provide low-cost solar-powered light and power products for people without access to reli-

7 WARE STREET
A Borrower Be

In late 2008, at the depths of the financial crisis, the University borrowed 52.5 billion, expensively (at tax-exempt and taxable interest rates of 5.4 percent and 5.8 percent) to shore up its liquidity and provide flexibility within the endowment, and for other defensive purposes. Interest expense, about 4.2 percent of the budget in fiscal year 2008, shot painfully up to 7.1 percent of constrained spending two years later. Harvard retained its top-tier AAA/Aaa credit rating—important for some endowment-management strategies, and useful for restructuring future borrowing costs. Administrators made it clear that they were henceforth debt-averse, and that deans bent on building something sooner rather than later.

Fast-forward to 2015. The Harvard Campaign has already secured more than $6 billion (see page 20), and will be the largest of its kind in higher-education history. The endowment has exceeded its pre-crisis peak (at least nominally; see page 22). So it may seem counterintuitive to borrow again, but the logic suggests that the University can, and will, for academic purposes—sooner rather than later.

Plans have been unveiled for the huge science and engineering center in Allston, where much of the engineering and applied sciences faculty is to be housed before the end of the decade (see page 27). Fundraisers are soliciting for gift support, but absent some deus ex machina (and the campaign has already produced several), debt will be needed to get the job done. The Faculty of Arts and Sciences is redoubling appeals to pay for House renewal; but according to its financial statements, it continues to decapitalize endowment appreciation, to the tune of some hundreds of millions of dollars, to fund that and other priorities—perhaps a significant reason its endowment is still a half-billion dollars below the 2008 level. Its House renewal plan explicitly envisions use of endowment funds, gifts, reserves, cash from operations, and “incremental” long-term debt to finish the job. And there are other high priorities for gifts.

Borrowing funds might complicate the fundraisers’ story somewhat. But many of Harvard’s most significant donors are financially sophisticated investors who use debt to achieve returns; they will understand. Rates for Harvard to borrow long term are in the range of 4 percent—below endowment returns. It would be unfortunate to pay top dollar in 2008 and then miss the low point for loan costs today. And the rating agencies have indicated they are in a tolerant mood, given the University’s strengthened balance sheet and financial disciplines. The fundraising success enables borrowing, rather than precluding it.

—John S. Rosenberg, Editor
I read the article with rising incredulity. After all, capitalism created and maintains the pyramid, without which it could not continue to function. A world in which the “bottom of the pyramid” was flourishing would not be capitalistic. Capitalism stole a large percentage of the adult workforce of Africa, and transported it to the American continents. Both the slave trade and slave labor created huge returns on investments, and according to many individuals then and now, was enormously beneficial to the Africans, at least the ones who survived.

Meanwhile, capitalism stole African land and resources, shattered traditional cultural patterns, and created a cash economy that forced the dispossessed and traumatized Africans to work the plantations and mines. Again, capitalism created hefty returns on investment, and proclaimed great benefit to the Africans, who were thereby introduced to “industrial discipline.”

I suppose it makes sense to send young students of capitalism to the ravaged source of so much of the world’s wealth. Yet I must ask the professors of capitalism, in the words of Joseph Welch, “Have you no sense of decency, sir, at long last? Have you left no sense of decency?”

LORRAINE BABER ’68
OAKLAND, CALIF.

“COWBOY DOCTORS”

It was transparent to me why “Cowboy Doctors and Health Costs” (September-October, page 7) came to the conclusion that physicians are to blame for driving up healthcare costs. The author only referenced and gave the perspectives of analysts and business administrators: the people who are responsible for balance sheets—not clinical outcomes; the people who don’t get their hands dirty. The article suggests that it is a “lack of financial penalty” that causes doctors to “recommend unnecessary procedures.” I would have to disagree, however, as doctors have to consider malpractice and work within parameters that produce inefficiencies that are designed to protect the finances of third parties. Are healthcare analysts, hospital administrators, and health insurance executives held accountable for each individual patient?

I question that someone who is going to be held accountable for an individual patient outcome would “draw an analogy to auto mechanics,” as was proposed in this article. Let the analysts and administrators have the bedside conversation with a patient about getting a new life and donating the one they have for scrap parts. It’s easy to tell the “cowboy” how to ride when you’ve never been on a horse.

DINA D. STRACHAN ’88
M.D.
AGLOW DERMATOLOGY
NEW YORK CITY

I found the article’s unsubstantiated generalizations insulting, inaccurate, and not in the best interest of patient care or our society. It is very trendy to blame doctors for the escalating costs of patient care and to claim they just do as they wish without regard to patient wishes (as in the second-to-last paragraph). I’d suggest you actually talk to some front-line physicians who are practicing every day, making decisions with patients every day, and using their years of knowledge to help guide care that is in the best interest of the patient. I find it funny that your author and [Dartmouth health-policy professor Elliott] Fisher lament the “imbalance in the physician-patient relationship.” What exactly are you referencing? Is it the four years of medical school and three to nine years of postgraduate medical education that physicians pursue in order to become experts at caring for patients? Is it the responsibility that we have sworn to do no harm and do good?

I know the point you’re trying to make...
own experience” is comical. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has just determined that 1 percent of my pay (soon to be more) will be based on “patient satisfaction.” Every day I have patients who demand an MRI, who want expensive tests they don’t need. Every week, I care for patients at the end of their lives who have no chance of survival and whose families insist that I keep resuscitating. What is my mechanism to say no? There is none. So, should I just order them to improve my patient satisfaction scores and reduce my liability risk?

I’d look deeply at the true costs of healthcare. I’m paid the exact amount now that I was paid in 2008. It is about the same (adjusting for inflation) as my dad made in the 1980s. I can tell you that billions are spent on administrative costs, inappropriate transfers of patients, outdated EMS protocols, CMS compliance, billing, ridiculous coding, etc. All of which provide little actual benefit to the patient.

You should strongly consider editing the article to read “physicians surveyed” rather than “doctors” or “physicians.” That, and maybe get a doctor involved.

David W. Callaway, M.P.A. ’09, M.D. Harvard Medical School instructor in medicine, 2008-2010 Charlotte, N.C.

Researchers David Cutler, Jon Skinner, and Ariel Stern respond: Physician behavior and the appropriateness of medical practices clearly strike a chord with practitioners and patients, as evidenced by the letters published above and several sent independently to us. It may be helpful to lay out what we know. First, in the United States there is enormous variation in medical practice across areas. This variation is not associated with sicker patients or better health outcomes. Second, when a large group of physicians are presented with a set of vignettes describing hypothetical patients, roughly 25 percent suggest treatments not recommended by professional society guidelines. In our paper, written with David Wennberg, M.D., we labeled these physicians “cowboys” not in the sense of being aberrant, but in the sense of being individualistic—much like John Wayne’s cowboy characters who make their own rules. Third, regions with a higher fraction of cowboys experience greater per capita spending, especially at the end of life.

None of these facts implies that physicians are greedy or not subject to considerable (and growing) pressures from patients and management in today’s challenging healthcare environment. Many of the letter writers colorfully point out these other pressures. Nor do these facts speak in the least to stagnant physician salaries, another issue that clearly (and rightly) bothers some readers.

What our results do show is that physi-
My general education (within the Core framework then in place) yielded something not entirely captured by either the interdisciplinary values that are the stated goal of the current Gen Ed program or the interdisciplinary well-roundedness associated with distribution requirements.

What I learned over four years of fine courses on modern American poetry with Helen Vendler, on organic chemistry with Eric Jacobsen, on justice and medieval castles and civil infrastructure and the Vietnam War, was that the worlds of thought and of action—and of different forms of thought, and different kinds of action—can profitably be brought together in myriad ways. This is not so far from how Wang describes her experience: “I do earnestly believe that the values, skills, goals, and perspectives with which I approach the world have been shaped by my four years here.”

I don’t think that the integrating function these courses served for me was always consciously intended. But it could be, and I would argue should be, incorporated in the design of courses explicitly intended for general education. Such a requirement need not be onerous—it could take the form of one or two lectures in which a professor takes up subject matter usually associated with another discipline, or considers another discipline’s perspective on the subject matter of her own.

An ambitious program of general education should not be merely a bulwark against excessive focus on a chosen concentration, nor merely a prod to push “excellent sheep” (in the words of Bill Deresiewicz) out of their pens. It should be a key that unlocks the methods of particular disciplines to be applied and adapted across the whole range of challenges that constitute, as the committee puts it, *ars vivendi in mundo*.

Evan Hepler-Smith ’06
Ph.D. candidate in history of science, Princeton
Newark, N.J.

Terry Murphy’s letter, “Undergraduate Education” (September-October, page 5), which laments—rightfully—the loss of the undergraduate General Education requirements of the 1950s, has one small error: John
Painstakingly designed for Leavitt & Peirce. Price is per bookend.

J. Schruers ’28.

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LETTERS

Conway was the master of Leverett House, not Kirkland.

Blair F. Bigelow ’60
Pelham, Mass.

POP-ART NUN
I was interested and informed by “Nun with a Pop Art Habit” (September-October, page 48). I have loved Corita Kent’s beautiful Boston Gas Tank (Rainbow Tank) and always eagerly look for it when I am on that stretch of highway (which doesn’t have much else to recommend it).

But why didn’t your story mention the Ho Chi Minh profile Kent hid in the blue stripe? Surely it is an interesting wrinkle that Kent was a nun who became a major pop artist…and apparently admirer of the communist leader!

Jonathan Poritz ’85
Colorado Springs

Editor’s note: The exhibition curator says the Ho Chi Minh story is an urban legend, with no basis in fact, and that the artist herself consistently declined to discuss it.

In the article, Rainbow Tank is referred to as a “much beloved landmark.” The description in one of the informative texts posted by the Harvard Art Museums curators (which are wonderfully educational) gives much the same sense of the piece.

That’s the way I’ve long thought of it—and dismissed it—before seeing the tank in the context of Kent’s other works in the exhibition. Now I don’t see how one can overlook the religious irony of this work, given the pervasive spiritual irony Kent evidently conveyed in her other work. As the article and exhibition point out, Kent repeatedly jolted the viewer by juxtaposing words of consumerism with words freighted with religious or spiritual meaning. So in Boston Gas Tank, we have the rainbow, a symbol from the biblical story of Noah and the Flood, but also, as sung in the African-American spiritual, “no more water, be fire next time.” This on a natural-gas tank bearing, at the time of Kent’s commission, the logo of Boston Gas, complete with small flame. Did Kent seek to go beyond simply decorating a corporate icon, by imbuing the result with additional meaning? Or is this interpretation (please turn to page 91)
revitalization of the nearby Harvard Club of Victoria in 1998, and has been instrumental in coordinating the annual Krokidilo tour in Sydney for well over 20 years.

Peter A. Carfagna ’75, J.D. ’79, of Shaker Heights, Ohio, has been a member of the Harvard Club of Cleveland’s schools and scholarships committee since 1979, served as a senior class marshal, been active in the quinquennial reunion-gift committees through the Harvard College Fund, and in 2002 became an elected director of the HAA. The former president of the Harvard Law School Association of Cleveland has also been a visiting lecturer in sports law at the school and faculty adviser to the Sports Law Clinical Placement Program since 2006.

Robert P. Fox Jr. ’86, of Cambridge, has held numerous roles in the HAA, including vice president for College affairs, chair of the classes and reunions committee, and appointed director. He has also chaired four reunions and serves as class secretary. Fox is active with The Holden Choruses: he recently chaired its long-range planning committee, is the Harvard Glee Club’s graduate adviser, and became vice president of the glee club’s foundation in October. In September, he chaired the Harvard Gender & Sexuality Caucus’s Cambridge conference, “What Should We Do After ‘I Do’?”

Joan Keenan ’45, HRP ’47, of Lexington, Massachusetts, worked on behalf of Radcliffe for decades, including as a trustee from 1974 to 1980, a class and reunion chair (most recently for her seventieth), and as an officer of the Alumnae and Friends of Radcliffe College. Her contributions, benefiting both the College and the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, earned her the Radcliffe Distinguished Service Award in 1995 and the Radcliffe Institute Apple Tree Award in 2005. Keenan is also a 50-year member and former vice president of the Harvard Club of Boston and a past officer and member of the HBS Club of Boston.

Robert M. Kraft ’76, of Encino, California, has co-chaired the Harvard Office for the Arts’ advisory committee and been a member of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences Arts Resource Council, the Harvard clubs of New York and Southern California, and Harvardwood. A panelist for the “Harvard in Hollywood” Alumni College in 2005, he has also lectured on film music and participated in workshops with student composers. In 2008 he became an HAA elected director.

Nancy Sinsabaugh ’76, M.B.A. ’78, of Cambridge, serves as class treasurer (she has been an executive committee member of the Association of Harvard College Class Secretaries and Treasurers) and has chaired several reunions (including those of her HBS class). A member or former member of Harvard and HBS clubs in France, Luxembourg, Minnesota, New York, and Boston, Sinsabaugh was also an alumni interviewer from 1994 to 2005. As a veteran of the HAA’s Happy Observance of Commencement Committee, she designed the hats now worn by its women members and provides televised commentary for the Annual Meeting of the HAA. Her roles on the HAA’s board of directors have included treasurer and chair of the classes and reunion committee.

Hiram Hunn Awards

SEVEN ALUMNI received Hiram S. Hunn Memorial Schools and Scholarships Awards from the Harvard College Office of Admissions and Financial Aid on October 2 for their volunteer work: recruiting and interviewing prospective undergraduates.

William L. (“Ike”) Eisenhart ’74, of Seattle, has co-chaired the Harvard Club of Seattle’s schools and scholarships committee since 2002, following several years of interviewing candidates.

Tanya Ryk Friedman ’94, of New York City, is a vice president of the Harvard Club of New York City. A recent past president of the Harvard Club of New York Foundation, she has also served as the club’s schools and scholarships committee co-chair.

Anita Warren Fritze ’64, of Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, has interviewed students for more than 25 years for the Harvard Club of Boston.

Marsha Hirano-Nakanishi, Ed.D. ’81, of Los Angeles, is executive vice president of the Harvard Club of Southern California. She also recently served as the interim vice president for the schools and scholarships committee.

Meg Streeter Lauck ’79, of Sugar Land, Texas, was the interview coordinator for the Harvard University Club of Houston from 2009 to 2014.

Garrett Scott Olmsted ’68, Ph.D. ’76, of Tazewell, Virginia, is a long-time admissions interviewer, most recently in western Virginia.

David F. Pinto ’82, Ext ’88, of Longmeadow, Massachusetts, was an alumni interviewer for several years and has chaired the Harvard Club of Western Massachusetts’s schools and scholarships committee since 2005.
Nuts

“Your wooden arm you hold outstretched to shake with passers-by.”

When Primus was a little one, he had the good fortune to live near Broadway in Manhattan. Each holiday season, his parents would take the family to the Great White Way to see the latest magical musical, South Pacific perhaps, or Guys and Dolls. Then we would stroll over to the Harvard Club of New York on 44th Street and sit by the fire in the paneled richness of the place. Even the youngest among us was permitted a glass of unexpurgated eggnog, served by a tipsy waiter. These moments live in memory.

When the time came and Primus moved to Cambridge, he searched for similar entertainments for his family in the Boston so-called theatre district, but all he found during Christmas week was precious little. Years later, it’s mostly the unstoppable Blue Man Group and The Nutcracker.

Mrs. Primus had a niece who lived near Hartford, Connecticut, and as soon as the girl learned to walk, she began to dance in The Nutcracker with the Hartford Ballet. She danced it year after year after year, and went on to dance it (and other things) professionally with the Nashville Ballet. During this dear girl’s childhood, it was necessary to watch her dance in The Nutcracker. By the time she was grown, Primus had seen the ballet 782 times. What he would have given for some Guys and Dolls.

Of course, The Nutcracker is the salvation of many ballet companies in America, a crucial part of their economic equations. Jennifer Fisher, a former snowflake and flower, and now associate professor of dance at the University of California, Irvine, has written a book about the ballet, Nutcracker Nation: How an Old World Ballet Became a Christmas Tradition in the New World. She notes that after the ballet immigrated to the United States in the mid-twentieth century and was choreographed by George Balanchine, it began to thrive and variegate. Hawaiians added hula, Canadians added hockey, and so on.

Primus strives not to take a dark view of this beloved ballet. Neither does Henry D. Rogers ’54, of Jacksonville, Florida. He wrote to report that he had been named Florida Land Realtor of the Year 2014, not only for sales production but also for dancing in The Nutcracker for the past 35 years.

“The 175 or so of us in the production, accompanied by the Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra, are volunteers except two national leads,” he explains. “My first time in Nutcracker was in 1977, when my daughter, Katherine, had charge of rehearsing the Party Scene, first act. Three weeks before it was going on stage, she said, ‘Dad, I have to have one more man on stage and you are it,’ knowing that with my ballroom ability it could work out. The first rehearsal I went to, a gorgeous sweet blonde came up to me and said, ‘I am your partner.’ (Where in the hell had I been and why not here? was my thought...) For many years, I was one of the adults in the Party Scene, once as Herr Drosselmeyer, a few times as a butler, and for the past 15 years or so as Grandfather. It has been my main volunteer contribution to the city for many years and good for my business.”

Primus cannot stop talking about himself, apparently. At 5:27 p.m. on November 9, 1965, he was sitting with his spouse, cross-legged, on the naked floor of a house they had just bought in Cambridge near the Common, a thing normal people can no longer do. They were with friends, lifting a celebratory glass of something when the lights went out. The entire northeast of the United States and large parts of Canada went dark, creating much mischief and some disaster. That evening 80,000 square miles of habitat were without power, leaving 30 million people in persistent dark. Yours truly scoffed at the darkness. He believed, then as now, that he lived in a citadel of enlightenment.

— PRIMUS V
as fanciful as the one that found Ho Chi Minh’s profile in one of the swaths of color? Jonathan Bockian, J.D. ’74 Watertown, Mass.

Thank you so much for your recent article. I did, however, want to contact you about a few errors. Corita entered the order in 1936, not 1938. The college was Immaculate Heart College; the order was the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The artist mentioned on page 50 is Aaron Rose (not Ross).

Corita did see the Warhol soup-cans show in 1962, the same year she made her first Pop print. However, I disagree with Susan Dackerman’s assertion that the juiciest tomato of all was a response to the soup-can paintings, as it was made over two years later and there were a number of other Pop prints in between.

Ray Smith, Ph.D.
Director, Corita Art Center
Los Angeles

Exhibition curator Susan Dackerman replies:
My apologies for the oversights that Ray Smith pointed out.

As for whether Kent’s tomato print was influenced by Warhol’s soup-can paintings, I stand by that interpretation. Yes, Kent’s print did appear two years after Warhol’s soup cans, but influence isn’t always immediate. Ideas grow as they are rehearsed and fed by related ideas.

WHRB

I am a big fan of the Harvard radio station: I would not make a decision on our move to a condo until I heard for myself that it had good reception of WHRB (“A Broadcast Cornucopia,” September-October, page 63). I am very grateful to the station for providing Boston with the Met opera broadcasts. However, I thought the article was a little hard on “the competition”—in Boston, WCRB, a 24-hour classical station that I’ve listened to since I was an undergrad. It has its flaws, including a mysterious aversion to vocal music, but it shouldn’t be dismissed so condescendingly. It plays war-horses, but it also plays music of many lesser-known composers, like Antonio Rosetti and J.B. Vanhal, who have certainly enriched my musical experience.

Stephanie Lang Martin ’59
Jamaica Plain, Mass.

HARVARD ASTRONOMERS

I am troubled by the comment (in Vita, “William Cranch Bond,” September-October, page 46). “The young nation was an astronomical wasteland.” Really? In Philadelphia, Penn faculty member David Rittenhouse (1732-1796) had observed the transit of Venus, determined the distance from earth to the sun, sighted Uranus, built his own telescopes, and constructed numerous orreries (models of the solar system), most of this before Bond was born. Philadelphia’s American Philosophical Society sponsored various astronomy projects and published the results. Alan Hirshfeld’s article yet again suggests that if something did not happen at Harvard, it did not happen.

Edward W. Kane, M.B.A. ’75
Concord, Mass.

The author replies: Although there were several individual and civic efforts to bolster U.S. astronomy prior to the so-called “observatory movement” of the 1830s, these were generally short-lived or of limited scientific consequence. Rittenhouse’s observatory was shuttered upon his death; the American Philosophical Society leased space for an observatory in 1817, but failed to raise money to install a decent telescope. A comprehensive 1832 report on international astronomy did not mention the U.S. at all. Would-be American astronomers with means traveled to Europe for training. As a Princeton astronomy graduate (who almost daily passed a Rittenhouse orrery on my way to class), I don’t view the history of my field through Crimson-colored glasses. That said, post-1830 Harvard was indeed a major force in the rise of modern American astronomy. A fuller account appears in my book, Starlight Detectives.

Stephen Soboroff, M.P.H.-S.M. ’81, M.D.
Marion, Ill.

WHY CAN’T WE MOVE?

In the September-October letters section, John S. Simourian comments about the state of America’s transportation facilities (page 4). He characterizes the gasoline tax as “regressive” and advocates a national tax essentially based upon income. He is wrong about the gasoline tax; it has been for over 100 years a user fee based on the concept that those who use our streets, roads, and highways should pay for their construction and maintenance. The 40-year fad of using a truly regressive tax, the sales tax, to finance public transit and even, in some instances, roads, should be the object of his criticism. More relevant, with the advent of electric and hybrid vehicles on streets paid for by motorists, a better user fee should be based upon miles traveled. The measuring technology exists.

Quentin L. Kopp, LL.B. ’52
San Francisco

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