On Campus, Concisely

Race Debate, and Defacement

HARVARD LAW SCHOOL (HLS) was rattled in November after black tape was pasted over portraits of its African-American professors in Wasserstein Hall, thrusting the University into the national spotlight amid growing concerns over racism on colleges campuses (see harvardmag.com/lawschool-16). President Drew Faust, who frequently has used her platform to advocate racial justice, an issue of deep personal significance to her, called the incident an “act of hatred...inimical to our most fundamental values.” University police are investigating the defacement as a hate crime; at press time, no results had been announced.

Faust has expanded her advocacy in recent months and years, following protests of racism at Harvard and other elite universities. Hours after defaced portraits were discovered, she e-mailed the University to announce the release of a more than year-long study by the College Working Group on Diversity and Inclusion, which included recommendations such as better resources for low-income students and a long-term focus on improving faculty diversity.

At the Law School, student activists have called for structural changes such as the removal of the crest of the slave-owning Royall family from the school’s official seal, echoing similar concerns at Yale and Princeton. After the portraits’ defacement, Dean Martha Minow acknowledged that racism remains a “serious problem” at the school and appointed a committee to reconsider its seal. Responses from others at the Law School, though, were more muted. “[R]eformers harm themselves by nurturing an inflated sense of victimization,” Klein professor of law Randall Kennedy, one of those whose portrait was defaced, wrote in a New York Times op-ed. Climenko professor of law Charles Ogletree, whose portrait was also defaced, said he believes the incident represents constitutionally-protected free speech, and urged the University community to exercise restraint in the face of prejudice.

Admissions Adjudication, Again

With oral arguments for the second appearance of Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin before the U.S. Supreme Court scheduled on December 9, Harvard filed an amicus brief defending colleges’ and universities’ ability to consider race and ethnicity as part of their holistic evaluation of applicants for admission. Consistent with its arguments in 2012 (see harvardmag.com/amicus-16) — and with such prior cases as Bakke (1978) and Grutter (2003) — the University maintained anew that in its “experience and educational judgment, a diverse community of students adds significantly to the educational experience and future success of all its graduates, from all backgrounds and races. A campus that is home to individuals with a deep and wide variety of academic interests, experiences, viewpoints, and talents enables students to challenge their own assumptions, to learn more deeply and broadly, to develop skills of collaboration and problem solving, and to begin to appreciate the spectacular complexity of the modern world.”

Urging the Court to “reaffirm its previous decisions recognizing the constitu-
1916 William Stanislaus Murphy, Class of 1885, leaves all his money to establish scholarships at the College for young men with his last name.

1926 The first movie theater in Cambridge is about to open across the street from the Yard.

Harvard Crimson staffers journey to New Haven to leave copies of an issue containing an article fiercely opposed to compulsory chapel at Yale on the doorsteps of Yale Daily News recipients. Yale's president states that “any contribution from Harvard would not in any way influence the committee in charge of the matter.”

1941 Reginald H. Phelps '30, assistant dean in charge of records, reports that, between 1920 and 1940, the number of undergraduates making the dean's list has risen from 19.8 to 30.7 percent, while the list of those whose connection with the University was “severed” has shrunk from 7.4 to 4.4 percent. Both 1940 figures set new records.

1956 A letter from Venezuela to the president's office brings a reminder of the Thayer Transmittendum, a small award, started in 1848, dedicated to purchasing winter coats for deserving freshmen of little means. Of the seven recipients in the award’s 118 years, the most recent, Gilbert Slocum '49, has sent the original parchment of the Thayer Transmittendum, plus $75 (to cover inflation since his own receipt of $50), back to the College to pay for the coat of the next recipient.

1961 “To enhance the quality of our common life,” a student-faculty committee unanimously recommends establishing a foundation to improve relations among racial and ethnic groups on campus.

1966 The Bulletin salutes the publication of Babar Comes to America, in which the famous elephant visits Harvard, receives an honorary doctorate of letters, and hangs out at the Lampoon.

1981 “To enhance the quality of our common life,” a student-faculty committee unanimously recommends establishing a foundation to improve relations among racial and ethnic groups on campus.

General Education Revisited
In the wake of sharp faculty criticism aired last spring about the undergraduate General Education curriculum (see harvardmag.com/gened-16), the review committee conducted town-hall conversations with professors during the fall semester to test possible reforms. The curriculum, put into effect in 2009, requires students to take courses in eight categories, designed to assure that they account for the full complexity of holistic admissions processes that consider each applicant as an individual and as a whole; as embraced in Bakke, the brief contested arguments advanced by plaintiff Abigail Fisher’s counsel that would limit the proportion of applicants for whom race could be considered in admissions reviews, and narrow the evidence that could be used to make the pedagogical case for establishing diversity objectives.

The Court’s ruling is expected at the end of its term, in June.

Going (More) Global
Grants to support continuing and new climate-change research in China, announced in October, also heralded the launch of the Harvard Global Institute (HGI). The institute aims to secure donations which the University can channel, via grants from President Drew Faust, to support multidisciplinary research on complex global problems, possibly including urbanization, water, education, inequality, and migration. In the initial instance, a gift from Wang Jianlin, chairman of Wanda Group, a commercial-property developer (among other businesses), will underwrite such research within the People’s Republic; the work will be managed by the Harvard Center Shanghai.

HGI, as described by Walker professor of business administration Krishna G. Palepu, Faust’s senior adviser for global strategy, is a virtual organization. Without building its own staff or facilities, it hopes to secure funding to underwrite faculty members’ research, and scale it up—in host countries and on campus—and to make use of and strengthen Harvard schools’ and academic centers’ existing offices and infrastructure around the world, like the Shanghai center.

Read a full report at harvardmag.com/hgi-16.
acquire some breadth of intellectual exposure as well as some grounding in ethical reasoning and the broader responsibilities of citizenship. Sean D. Kelly, Martignetti professor of philosophy and chair of that department, reported for the review committee last May that “in practice our program is a chimera: it has the head of a Gen Ed requirement with the body of a distribution requirement.” (The program, as implemented, allowed as general-education courses hundreds of specialized departmental offerings that failed to embody the underlying pedagogical aim.)

In a briefing for Faculty of Arts and Sciences colleagues on November 3, Kelly said that the goals of general education had been found worthwhile as the core of undergraduates’ liberal-arts education. But of the 574 or so courses deemed to qualify for General Education, only 120 were purpose-built for and effective in that role. The committee felt that requiring only four courses, rather than eight, might be adequate—so long as a course in empirical and mathematical reasoning were also required (and for which many departmental courses were well suited). In effect, this would add to the expository-writing requirement a course in quantitative skills.

But the faculty forums, he said, indicated that colleagues felt that in an era of specialized learning, four general-education courses would be too few to ensure students’ breadth of learning. Thus, on December 1, the committee proposed a four-course general-education requirement plus a three-course distribution requirement plus the new quantitative-reasoning unit. Legislation will be scheduled for faculty consideration this spring; academic advisers and the registrar’s staff may need to prepare to counsel students about complex new curriculum requirements in future academic years.

~Marina Bolotnikova and John S. Rosenberg

THE UNDERGRADUATE

My Harvard Education

by Jenny Gathright ’16

You are growing into consciousness, and my wish for you is that you feel no need to constrict yourself to make other people comfortable. The people who must believe they are white can never be your measuring stick. I would not have you descend into your own dream. I would have you be a conscious citizen of this terrible and beautiful world.

Ta-Nehisi Coates

Between the World and Me

There is a man in front of me and he is talking about the apples he has grown. One of the apples was Thomas Jefferson’s favorite. Another is the original, real Granny Smith. You won’t find these in the grocery store, folks. He is talking about seeds and grafting, about history. Did you know that hard cider was the Founding Fathers’ primary method of hydration? Did you know that they were all drunk pretty much all the time?

The man grows the apples on his property in central Massachusetts, and he is thrilled to be back in his Harvard House, Lowell House, to hand out them out to students during dinner time. He has his class year, which, as I recall, begins with a “6,” written on his nametag. He is standing in front of me, and I am standing next to Jonathan, my lovely, gentle, kind Lowell House tutor.

The older man is still talking, and I am beginning to notice that, even though I have introduced myself, he has not looked at me since the start of the conversation. His body is pivoted towards Jonathan, who is pale and male and perhaps more visibly engaged in the process of looking at the apples. I am distracted. His historical factoids about hard cider have gotten me thinking about a drunken Thomas Jefferson wandering around Monticello, and this image makes me sick and scared in a way that the two men next to me will never understand.

I cannot be sure why he isn’t looking at me. Maybe I’m unaware that there is a terrible glare behind my face and he’s got to protect his eyes! But maybe it’s because Jonathan feels familiar, feels like the men he walked these halls with many years ago, and I do not. Maybe I am just woman enough, just brown enough, to be rendered invisible. It might all be in my head, but isn’t that sometimes just enough to make a moment uncomfortable?

There is a distance between my body and the bodies this place was built for. I feel it every day in Lowell dining hall, when I look up at portraits of white men and wonder if they expected me to be here. Here at Harvard, I learn in the ways I expected to learn—from my textbooks, from my professors, from my classrooms. But I am also learning what it means to be a walking disruption.

I am taking an economics class on libertarianism. I don’t consider myself a libertarian at all, so I took the class to challenge my thinking. I listen to Professor Jeffrey Miron espouse the libertarian perspective and carefully consider the ways in which it aligns and diverges with my values and beliefs. This is an important exercise for me.

One day, we are talking about the consequences of drug prohibition. Libertarians believe that the negative effects outweigh the positive effects. I’m sympathetic to the viewpoint, and I’m glad this policy debate is a topic of discussion. Professor Miron briefly lists “increased racial profiling” and the resulting “racial tensions” as a negative consequence of drug prohibition laws. He moves on—he has other slides to discuss, other lines of argument to explore. But I am stuck, still thinking about what it means for him to name “increased racial profiling” and “racial tensions” without naming Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Rekia Boyd, Freddie Gray, Sandra Bland…I want to stand up and scream about how the things he is talking about tear bodies apart.

I wonder how many students in that very white classroom are feeling what I feel in that moment. I look to my left and right and see students jotting down notes, continuing on to the next stage of the cost-benefit analysis. I send an innocuous and unrelated text message to a friend—I think