Cambridge 02138

Sexual assault, social-progress index, divestment

(COACH) MURPHY TIME

Harvard Magazine does a grave disservice glorifying football with a cover story on Tim Murphy (“Murphy Time,” November-December 2015, page 35). With overwhelming medical evidence that football causes chronic brain damage, how can Harvard, a university that values the intellect, continue to promote this threat to the intellectual and physical well-being of its students? As a leader in the academic world, Harvard should set an example by downplaying football. Unlike many other universities that don’t have its endowment, it doesn’t need money from this gladiator sport. Football games, the Harvard-Yale game in particular, when MIT president L. Rafael Reif published “A Plan for Action on Climate Change.” (It rejects divestment; news coverage focused on that—and a divestment sit-in greeted Reif the next day.) Building on MIT’s environment and energy initiatives (the latter explicitly premised on engagement with and funding from industry), Reif outlined a research agenda with eight low-carbon energy centers and $300 million of new funding during the next five years. Reporting relationships are outlined, assessments scheduled. Those efforts are married to education, outreach, and investments in campus sustainability like Harvard’s. That is what the Engineers do.

Harvard and MIT, both proud institutions, have an incentive to attract their own resources through capital campaigns (Harvard’s well advanced; MIT’s nearing launch). Harvard has expertise in government and public policy, law, medicine, and public health that MIT lacks; they overlap somewhat in architecture and business; and MIT is obviously an engineering powerhouse.

Given the stakes in climate change, what might Harvard and MIT do together? Their online teaching venture, edX, has been fruitful. What signal might a full-fledged academic collaboration on climate change send an anxious world—and how might it bring clarity to Harvard’s obvious, if diffuse, strengths?

~John S. Rosenberg, Editor

7 WARE STREET

A Modest Proposal

Harvard is so decentralized that members of the community may not know what they are all accomplishing individually—or might, together. The University, for instance, maintains that “Broad efforts to raise funds for energy and environment research across the campus have already generated nearly $120 million in committed support.” Those interested in the research are directed to a website, but it is hard to get a cohesive view of professors’ work and of the “250 courses” being taught; queries don’t yield much more insight. Absent that overview, campus debate about climate change has focused on faculty, student, and alumni advocacy of divesting certain endowment holdings, and University opposition to doing so. (A letter from faculty members on page 10 continues this exchange.)

That $120 million, it appears, may include much, or all, of a $31-million gift to the University Center for the Environment, in 2013; an eight-figure pledge to endow a new Center for Green Buildings and Cities; and several million dollars for the president’s $20-million, grant-making Climate Change Solutions Fund. It’s unclear if new professorships or research programs are pending, but informative forums continue: a November 16 panel previewed the imminent UN conference in Paris.

A different approach appeared in October, when MIT president L. Rafael Reif published “A Plan for Action on Climate Change.” (It rejects divestment; news coverage focused on that—and a divestment sit-in greeted Reif the next day.) Building on MIT’s environment and energy initiatives (the latter explicitly premised on engagement with and funding from industry), Reif outlined a research agenda with eight low-carbon energy centers and $300 million of new funding during the next five years. Reporting relationships are outlined, assessments scheduled. Those efforts are married to education, outreach, and investments in campus sustainability like Harvard’s. That is what the Engineers do.

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lar, should begin with the players extending their arms and shouting to the crowd, “We who are about to incur permanent brain damage salute you!”

Edwin Bernbaum ’67
Berkeley, Calif.

Editor’s note: The magazine’s recent news coverage has included a report on Harvard Medical School’s Football Players Health Study; a feature on traumatic brain injury; and an article on Crimson football alumni involved in designing safer helmets.

Dick Friedman’s article was magnificent. I’ve done some football writing, and this piece was extraordinary.

Brien Benson ’64
Arlington, Va.

I first met Coach Murphy in 1994, two weeks after he arrived at Harvard. He sat with me for several meals at Kirkland House, the new guy, hair still dark. Imagine my surprise to see his gray-haired picture on the cover more than 20 years later! I remember his nervousness, planning on how to best improve the game of football at his new employ, thinking about how to strengthen the team, hoping that the relocation of his family was the right choice, hoping he would make a good impression on the players he was about to hit the road to recruit. I am so truly glad that time has served him well, that Harvard football has grown to be respected, finally, under his tutelage.

I was not a football player, just another student in Kirkland, but he took the time to make my acquaintance. What struck me the most about him was that he was a good guy, a serious thinking person’s coach, interested not only in the mechanics of the game, but in so many other things, and conscientious. I was on the way to graduating, but he was just starting out. Harvard is lucky to have had him, and his players are too. You couldn’t hope for a better guy to be your coach. Much continued success to you, Coach Murphy!

Chi Wang ’95, M.S., J.D.
New York City

That undergraduates, caught up in the immediacy of the situation, should respond primarily on the emotional level is understandable. However, a more reflective and scientific response should be expected from more senior members of the Harvard community. With the notable exception of President Faust, no one seems to have considered that this is a social-systems problem and not only a moral problem.

I would like to stress three main points. First, the statistic with which we are presented derives from a single point in time. We have no definitive idea whether this represents a change from 20 or 50 years ago. It is not inconceivable that the present deplorable state of affairs represents an improvement over the past!

Second, we have less than half of the important data. These sexual assaults were not perpetrated by criminals rushing out of bushes or burglars invading dormitory rooms; they were primarily the result of actions by other Harvard students. What motivated these students and what prevented other students, who may have felt the same impulses, but refrained from acting on them? Thus, we would need a second, totally anonymous, survey of the entire pool of potential assailers [not all of whom can be assumed to be males] to find out how they view their behavior now, what they felt at the time, what facilitated or inhibited their behavior at the time, and what signals they interpreted or misinterpreted from the partner they assaulted.

Third, while it seems most plausible that alcohol facilitated many of the assaults, we are not entitled to assume that it was the only important facilitator. There are at least four other categories of substances that need to be considered: (1) illegal drugs such as cocaine, (2) the ultracaffeinated drinks, (3) the hormones that many athletes are cajoled or forced to take in order to improve their athletic performance, and (4) the stimulant drugs, such as amphetamines and methylphenidate, that are often prescribed to improve concentration.

One would also like to know whether these assaults have any relation to the college calendar; for example, do they peak prior to exams or other stressful events.

I can only hope that the task force appointed by President Faust contains some social psychologists and at least one statistics expert.
Max has never left my life. Some years ago, I had an artist replicate the painting for me. It now hangs in my winter home as a tribute to a life of art enjoyment. I was gratified recently when one of my granddaughters, touring Harvard, told me elatedly that Harvard owned a painting that was very much like mine. Wonderful! Wonderful! Wonderful!

RICHARD HIRSCHIORN ’54, M.D. ’58
Tucson

MAX BECKMANN AND MODERNITY
Joseph Koerner’s essay on the painting by Max Beckmann (“Making Modernity,” November-December, page 44) recalled for me a day in September 1950 when, as a new freshman, I passed the Busch-Reisinger Museum on the way to the biology building. Curious, I entered this unattractive building only to be greeted with wooden Jesus Christ writhing away under their diapers. I had no sympathy for others in pain as I could not understand how I was ever to survive my own travail. I walked up the stairs to the second floor only to be greeted by this incredible man staring down at me. It was a surreal experience which ignited a lifetime of collecting art.

Ernest Bergel, M.D. ’36
Brookline, Mass.
United States has an adult literacy rate of 99 percent, while that of Saudi Arabia is 94.65 percent. Assuming the accuracy of these statistics, the Saudi rate of illiteracy is more than five times higher than the U.S. rate. So how was Saudi Arabia made to look better than the U.S. on a measure of educational foundations?

Looking at the details for ABK, we see that the literacy rate is supplemented by three separate statistics on school enrollment. For primary school, the U.S. enrollment rate is 91.82 percent, while the Saudi rate is 93.45 percent. For lower secondary school, the U.S. enrollment rate is 98.04 percent, the Saudi Arabia rate is 118.01 percent (!). And for upper secondary school, the U.S. enrollment rate is 89.48 percent, while the Saudi rate is 110.36 percent.

How can Saudi Arabia (among other countries) have an enrollment rate higher than 100 percent, and should such a rate be considered a good thing? The SPI website has a methodology section, but it doesn’t actually give us any specifics for definitions and sources for the statistics.

By the definition of the World Bank, which creates most of these statistics, the secondary-school enrollment rate, for example, “is the total enrollment in secondary education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population of official secondary education age. [Enrollment rate] can exceed 100 percent due to the inclusion of over-aged and under-aged students because of early or late school entrance and grade repetition.”

Thus, the Saudi enrollment numbers are higher than 100 percent mostly because they are inflated by a lot of older students who are behind grade level. So here again we have the broadest and most relevant statistic, on which the United States fares quite well, offset by other statistics where it does not appear to do so. But unlike the HW measures mentioned above, where the additional statistics are at least legitimate measures of health (but are illogically double- and triple-counting many deaths in the United States), in the ABK category the high statistics for enrollment are counted as good things for Saudi Arabia when they are in fact measures of failure.

In short, the people putting together these statistics for SPI have created and are promoting highly misleading measures of social progress. I leave it to the reader to come to his or her own conclusions as to their motivation.

David W. Pittelli, S.B. ’86, A.M. ’87
Concord, N.H.

Lawrence University Professor Michael E. Porter responds: We are delighted that readers have engaged with the data in the Social Progress Index—this is the gap we have tried to fill. SPI is the first systematic attempt to create a holistic measure of the lived experiences of individuals around the world that is independent of GDP. By including the widest range of measures capturing multiple aspects of social progress, the Index offers countries and communities the ability to benchmark their strengths and weaknesses and mount a social progress agenda to achieve shared prosperity.

Many of our findings challenge self-perceptions and conventional wisdom, including our own. Indeed, the results for the United States are worrying: despite being the fifth wealthiest country in our sample in terms of GDP per capita, we rank sixteenth in terms of social progress. Clearly some readers find this surprising, which is understandable. Yet the data paint a clear picture of a U.S. that was once a leader in social progress, but is now falling behind.

For example, the United States ranks sixty-eighth in the world on “Health and Wellness.” This is a measure that covers not only life expectancy (where, at 78.7 years, we rank thirtieth in the world) but also health-related quality of life. In terms of the morbidity burden of obesity (where we rank 126th in the world) and mental health (we are eighty-first in the world on suicide rate), the United States performs poorly.

Though Peru, which a reader mentioned, is at a far lower level of economic development, its citizens nonetheless realize a comparable level of longevity and experience lower rates of obesity and death from suicide (and other elements of Health and Wellness) than the United States. Importantly, U.S. performance is not simply driven by problems of affluence that emerging countries are yet to face: the United States performs significantly worse on each of these measures than other rich countries such as Canada and France. There is also no double counting, as one reader suggested. Our principal component methodology is specifically designed to minimize or eliminate it.

U.S. educational performance is also troubling. On “Access to Basic Knowledge” the United States fares a little better (forty-fifth) but is still behind most other developed countries. This is not so surprising when we consider that our upper secondary school enrollment rate is just 89.48 percent (forty-ninth in the world). Saudi Arabia, mentioned by a reader, actually does perform better. Contrary to the reader’s assertion, our methodology caps enrollment at 100 percent and there is no bias in this comparison.

We invite readers to engage the data and methodology. To calculate an Index that allows fair comparisons, we use statistical techniques that minimize biases in comparisons. We only use publicly available data, and adjust for anomalies and inconsistencies (e.g., measures of school enrollment are top-coded at 100 percent). All the raw data, as well as indicator definitions, and the methodology for calculation are published on our website (www.socialprogressimperative/data/spi).

We wish the United States was performing better. Americans still tend to believe that our country is a leader in social progress, and in some key areas we still are. But we must face the facts that our health is lagging, our healthcare system is ineffective in important ways, and too many kids are dropping out of high school. Rather than denying or trying to explain away these problems, we should focus our energies on fixing them.

ENDOWMENT ASSESSMENTS

President Faust’s November-December column (The View from Mass Hall, page 3) celebrated the “immortality” of an endowment gift. We tried to make a $1-million planned gift to support a good cause in perpetuity at Harvard, but couldn’t come to terms with the development staff. They insisted on using some income from our

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 617-495-0234. Letters may be edited to fit the available space.
endowment gift for “other priorities,” describing the amount as “currently 10 to 15 percent,” with no limit, a practice called “taxing” in development vernacular.

Taxes make Faust’s math misleading. The 5 percent for causes intended by endowment donors is before taxing; that is actually more like 4 percent after taxing, and under the terms offered us, that could become zero at Harvard’s option.

We did make similar gifts with four other universities, and all four agreed never to “tax” income from our gifts, with stated, agreed backup purposes if ours became problematic over time. Harvard’s terms let it determine when our gift’s intent proved unworkable, and then decide what to do with its income.

We did specifically ask about a restricted gift of the kind mentioned by President Faust as comprising 70 percent of the endowment, and drew a flat “No.” Harvard could do better. Suggestions: (1) State Harvard’s policy on endowment gifts, covering what kinds of endowment gifts it welcomes, what it will accept as restrictions, and essentials of terms it thinks important. (2) Get transparent on taxing. Say what gets taxed, at what rates, what doesn’t. Set limits. (3) Work harder on alternative purposes to satisfy genuine donor intent rather than leaving all choice to Harvard. Other universities do this better. (4) Review the ethics of Harvard’s development generally, going open-book on matters well-intentioned donors might not ask about, staff-compensation policy, and anything else that might concern alumni and prospective donors if they knew the facts.

NAME WITHHELD UPON REQUEST

Masthead Moves

After 16 years of service, digital technologies and production director Mark Felton has moved to a new career in technology consulting; he leaves with our deep appreciation and warm best wishes. We welcome to the staff Marina Bolotnikova ’14, arriving from the editorial board of the Toledo Blade, and Lydialyse Gibson, a veteran of the University of Chicago’s excellent alumni magazine. You will enjoy their work in these pages and online.

~The Editors

Paul J. Finnegan, Fellow of Harvard Corporation and Treasurer, responds: Harvard thrives academically with the support of the University’s effective administrative framework and careful resource management. With regard to the assessment of endowed funds, critical functions throughout the University and Schools are necessary to provide high-quality services—such as student services, academic planning, facilities operations and maintenance, finance and human resources, and information technology, as well as other aspects of general administration. These costs are defrayed in part by using a portion of the endowment’s annual distribution. This recovery policy—which varies from School to School—ensures that each endowed fund plays a role in sustaining Harvard so that it can admit and support the very best students, hire and retain a world-class faculty, and conduct cutting-edge research.

It is important to note that before Harvard accepts any gift, we must ensure that the prospective donor’s goals and the University’s priorities are aligned. Sometimes this is not the case, and the University may discuss alternative gift opportunities that better match the institutional mission with donor intentions. On rare occasions when it’s not possible to achieve this alignment, the University may conclude that it is in the best interest of both the donor and the University to not accept a gift.

DIVESTMENT DEBATE

Views on divestment from fossil fuels vary, but the unwillingness of the Corporation and President to engage faculty, students, and alumni in an open forum regarding this question undercuts academic principles of exchange. For eighteen months, 261 faculty have requested in writing and in person such a forum. The Corporation has never responded.

In October, at a Faculty of Arts and Sciences meeting, President Faust said that she and the Corporation would refuse to participate in any such forum. She stated, “there had been many public forums,” but none, to our knowledge, in which a member of the Corporation addressed divestment in open (please turn to page 83)
LETTERS (continued from page 10)

discussion. She dismissed those calling for open meetings as merely seeking “public relations.” She’d entertain “other formats,” apparently not open ones.

On this issue hundreds of faculty and thousands of alumni and students feel passionately.

The decision of the Corporation not to discuss divestment openly is a severe disappointment. Such discussion is what a university stands for, and the more a question is controversial, the more it involves the missions and values of the University, then the more such open discussion should occur. We benefitted from it when wrestling with divestment regarding South Africa. Whatever one’s view on divestment from fossil fuels, the refusal of the Corporation and President to engage with faculty, students, and alumni in an open forum regarding the matter should be regarded as contrary to fundamental principles of the University.


From the Harvard Chan School of Public Health, Harvard Paulson School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, Business, Law, Medical, Divinity, and Kennedy Schools, and the Faculty of Arts and Sciences President Drew Faust and William F. Lee, Senior Fellow of the Harvard Corporation, respond: We share the concern of divestment advocates about the grave risks posed by climate change. We have listened carefully and repeatedly to their arguments in various contexts. The President and other members of the Corporation have met on at least a dozen occasions with student and faculty proponents of divestment, and addressed related questions in a range of public settings. Indeed, we have created numerous such settings for discussion of approaches to climate change, most recently last month with a panel on the United Nations Conference on Climate Change in Paris, at which a number of divestment advocates contributed excellent questions. We have publicly stated our rationale (statement of October 3, 2013, www.harvard.edu/president/news/2013/fossil-fuel-divestment-statement) for believing that Harvard’s proper approach to confronting climate change should focus on research, education, smart use of our convening power, creative efforts to reduce our own carbon footprint, and engagement with key players toward genuinely effective solutions.

Faculty, students, and staff across Harvard are making extraordinary contributions (www.harvard.edu/tackling-climate-change) toward the search for climate change solutions, through scientific, technological, and policy efforts. Our Climate Change Solutions Fund is supporting innovative projects of particular promise. Our new Harvard Global Institute has directed its inaugural major grant to a multiyear climate change initiative focused on China. Our Center for the Environment is a crossroads for work on energy and environment. Faculty are deeply engaged in the Paris talks. And on our own campus, greenhouse gas emissions have fallen by 21 percent since 2006. Across Harvard’s schools, faculty, students, and staff are rising to the climate challenge with the will and resourcefulness it demands, and we look forward to continuing that work.

ERRATA

IN THE BREVIA section of the September-October 2015 issue (page 21), you misspell the last name of Arthur Levine, the founding head of the new education school at MIT. And before becoming president of Teachers College at Columbia University, he was a professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

DONALD E. HELLER, Ed.M. ’92, Ed.D. ’97
Dean, College of Education
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Mich.

In the November-December 2015 issue, in “Once Upon a Time” in Translation” (page 72), the name of Adam Freudenheim’s older daughter should be Suzanna, not Nina. The full names of the publishing company and imprint covered in the article are “Pushkin Press” and “Pushkin Children’s Books.” And U.K. bookseller Waterstone’s chose Pushkin’s first Oksa Pollock novel as its “Children’s Book of the Month,” not for its book club.

In “Murphy Time” (page 39), the correct title of the book cited is Third H Book of Harvard Athletics, and defensive end Tim Fleischer’s name was misspelled. We regret the errors.

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