Winthrop. But he does offer a few clues to understanding a large part of a Harvard education—in the 1750s as much as in 2016: the intellectual and social impact of the students upon each other. To appreciate this effect, one must understand two facts about colonial Harvard: its primary purpose was to educate future members of a learned ministry and an effective civil government; and it did this in a highly structured social world. From the 1640s to 1770, the president and faculty ranked the members of each entering class in the fall of their freshman year according to their perception of the social standing of each student’s parents and other close relatives. This order was largely preserved until graduation day, at which time several students who had done exceptionally well were finally recognized with speaking parts, regardless of their social standing.

As the son of a Braintree farmer, church deacon, and town selectman, Adams was ranked in the middle of his class and awarded a scholarship. As an undergraduate, he responded with enthusiasm to three opportunities not available in Braintree. He seriously engaged the College’s relatively liberal curriculum in theology, mathematics, and natural science; he made friends with students from different social classes, often those above his own; and he joined a speaking club where his performances so impressed his classmates that they suggested he would make a better lawyer than the minister his pious father desired. (He would become the only graduate in his class to hold a Hollis scholarship and not become a minister.)

Harvard acknowledgments of Adams’s intellectual engagement came quickly. A speaking part at graduation in 1755 earned him his first job, as a teacher; he used his salary to pay for his legal studies. His use of the College library after graduation sustained him until he could build up his own impressive collection in legal and political history. And in his master’s thesis address in 1758, a rite of passage for most ambitious Harvard graduates, he defended a theme that would rank in the middle of his class and award for a law position.

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place to stay at home with a loving and supportive family. Yet, the idea was nerve-wracking.

For many Harvard students, the pathways to postgraduate careers are relatively clear and regimented, and ample summer internships are fixtures of the schedule. This is not to say that, for example, the reported 40 percent of the class of 2016 who ended up working in finance or consulting weren’t wrestling with existential quandaries about their futures. I’d bet that most were. But, given the extensive recruiting process, the on-campus interview program, the tailor-made internship-to-analyst-to-business-school job runway, an attractive-to-do list emerges that makes it easier to manage the confounding idea of one’s own future. Fully knowing that their path wasn’t mine, I still couldn’t help but feel worried about the relative lack of structure in my summer routine.

Harvard undergraduates interested in the arts commonly complain that the first steps down the path are not so obvious. For hopeful writers, the landscape can seem bleak. As print publishing continues to suffer and media further conglomerates toward Google & Co., there seem to be fewer and fewer entry-level positions. Many print internships are unpaid, which makes the paid gigs fiercely competitive. Some outlets that received grief and legal trouble for not paying interns, most famously Condé Nast, have decided to eliminate their internship programs to avoid the hassle, replacing them with “fellowships” not meant for matriculated students.

Given all these hurdles, I had to, jobless and on my own terms, declare myself a writer. When I shuffled around to places with my parents over the summer and people asked me what I was doing, I said, sheepishly, “I’m working on a few writing projects.” I thought back to all the superficial things that helped attract me to writing in the first place, all the flourishes that extend beyond the words on the page. I remembered how Albert Camus looked on the dust jacket of The Stranger in my little high-school library: thick pea coat, collar popped, cigarette dangling from lips, knowing eyes peering. I remembered how smart and right everything looked the first time I walked into the Advocate, the juniors and seniors dressed in black, sipping wine in the candlelit clapboard house, projecting their 20-year-olds’ sense of writerliness. I remembered the dust jacket of The Stranger in my little high-school library: thick pea coat, collar popped, cigarette dangling from lips, knowing eyes peering. I remembered how smart and right everything looked the first time I walked into the Advocate, the juniors and seniors dressed in black, sipping wine in the candlelit clapboard house, projecting their 20-year-olds’ sense of writerliness.

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Rebuilding...or Reloading?

In the early going, the Harvard football team was enjoying its accustomed dominance.

It was either sheer inertia or a heartfelt tribute to Tim Murphy that made the voters in the Ivy League’s preseason football poll place two-time defending champion Harvard on top again for 2016. More likely it was the latter; in his 22 seasons on the Crimson sideline, the coach had produced nine titles, plus a startling 15 consecutive seasons with seven or more wins. Moreover, in the previous three seasons Harvard was an omnipotent 28-2. Still, could any program survive the loss through graduation of 13 All-Ivy performers (including the league’s 2015 offensive player of the year, quarterback Scott Hosch ’16) and deserve to be tabbed number one? Wasn’t 2016 a season for lowered expectations?

In the early going, the wisdom of the crowd seemed to be confirmed. Spearheaded by Hosch’s replacement, Joe Viviano ’17, the Crimson got off to a strong start, with easy victories over non-conference foes Rhode Island and Georgetown sandwiched around an impressive road triumph over league rival Brown. The tougher part of the schedule loomed—particularly back-to-back away games with Princeton and Dartmouth—but Harvard at the least would present a formidable hurdle for other aspiring titleholders.

If writing, or doing any sort of creative work, is about learning your own method to negotiate these two landscapes—fitting one into the other, forcing both to influence each other, living between and in both—then there’s no internship that can promise this lesson, at least directly. My peers and I who are annoyed by the relatively unclear path to an artistic career should perhaps find solace in this fact. As the summer went on, I think I grew more confident in this conviction. I hadn’t yet articulated it as such, but I could feel my writing getting better as I tried inflecting it more with a sense of the backyard. In retrospect, the fiction that resulted was only able to circle around Big Ideas—evolving masculinity, the spirit of growing up, whatever it was—by reacting sensitively to all the things I did with my little brother, my parents, and my friends in my lazy hometown. I worked on lots of projects over the summer—a senior thesis, magazine journalism, a comedy musical, short stories—but if I can just manage to take forward the idea of living sensitively in the backyard in my writing, and my life at large, I’ll consider those few months, waking up late in the basement, a huge accomplishment.

Berta Greenwald Ledecky Undergraduate Fellow
Matthew Browne ’17 is looking for a writing job despite all this.

New quarterback Joe Viviano ’17 unfurled passes with force and finesse, even as defenses had to account for his dangerous running ability.

who were in NFL camps: Adam Redmond, Cole Toner, and Anthony Fabiano. Gone also were tight end/H-back Ben Braunecker (to the Chicago Bears’ practice squad) and rambling running back Paul Stanton Jr. At the