Silicon Valley appears to offer undergraduates a form of disruption just subversive enough to upset the status quo, but not so subversive as to upset their parents.

Undergraduates looking to strike it rich in the Valley tend to split into two camps. The first group aims to work for existing tech outfits like Twitter or Google, companies known not only for paying well but also for providing employees with luxurious perks such as company gyms, subsidized apartments in trendy cities, and free food. There’s also an advantage to applying for summer internships, since the competition for entry-level jobs in the Valley increases precipitously post-graduation. On-campus recruiting allows students to cut the line, and 50 percent of those who land Facebook internships in their junior summer find a return offer waiting for them in the fall, practically erasing senior-year future-job anxiety.

Those in the second group hope to start a company of their own, dropping out of school to eat ramen on the floor of a cluttered Palo Alto flophouse as they dream up the Next Big Thing. While very few actually have the chutzpah to quit college, aspiring iconoclasts, pitching their nascent startups in the same hazy, delirious tone that idle writers use to talk about their always-deferred novels. University resources like the i-lab and the i3 Harvard College Innovation Challenge cultivate student start-ups, grooming pitches and matching budding CEOs up with industry mentors.

These two camps seem to reflect opposing values—one prizes security and conformity, the other risk and rebellion—but they aren’t as different as they appear. Many aimless undergraduates suffer from the perennial fear that they must choose between making money and changing the world. In Silicon Valley, though, it seems that they can have both. They can gamble on starting a company, potentially coming up with a new technology and making billions, or work for a Google or a Facebook, content with their financial security and their place in a company invested in innovation. No matter what path they choose, Silicon Valley appears to offer undergraduates a form of disruption just subversive enough to upset the status quo, but not so subversive as to upset their parents. It’s no wonder Zuckerberg became the face of Harvard for incoming freshmen like me.

In fact, last year Zuckerberg returned to campus to give the main address on Commencement day, making a case for the Harvard education he did not complete. He admitted that this made him an unusual choice as speaker, joking that the speech would be the first thing at Harvard he ever finished. But he argued that school gave him something beyond a degree. After all, the Harvard Facebook book is the company’s namesake; he started it, he said, to make the world feel more like a tight-knit college community.

This aspiration manifests in the company’s corporate culture as well. Facebook calls its headquarters a “campus,” with amenities including cafeterias, gyms, and shuttle services with free WiFi. The job application requires essays, interviews, and tests, not unlike the intellectual acrobatics one goes through to get into an elite college. And in the minds of those undergraduates who aspire to work there, both Silicon Valley and Harvard provide prestige, intellectual fulfillment, and a coddling space in which these still unformed geniuses can figure out what they want to do with the rest of their lives. Perhaps I was wrong to accuse Silicon Valley of invading Harvard; instead, they were never so separate in the first place.

Sometimes on my nighttime Widener trips I lug my bag of books past CS 50’s office hours, which turn the normal tomblike silence of the elegant second-floor Loker Reading Room into a cacophony of amateur coders typing and laughing and barking questions at passing TFs. It reminds me of a start-up’s open-office workspace: the high ceilings, the lack of cubicles, the programmers clustered around each table illuminated by their laptops’ glow. I know that some of these undergrads will end up working in similar—if less ornate—rooms across the Valley. I picture them, arriving on their first day of work, only to find themselves already at home.

Despite it all, Berta Greenwald Ledecky Fellow Natasha Lasky ’10 is still a Hist and Lit concentrator.

**SPORTS**

**Growing Pains**

A young men’s basketball team battles inconsistency.

In January, the men’s basketball team fell 62-56 against Vermont—the Crimson’s third consecutive loss, dropping their record to 5-9, with the Ivy League opener against Dartmouth just days away. The situation looked grim, yet the players spoke Optimistically. “It’ll click for us eventually,” said Seth Towns ’20. “Our record,”
added Chris Lewis ’20, “doesn’t show how good of a team we are.”

This underscored the team’s dilemma. On paper, they are studs: Towns and Lewis are two of four sophomores who were ranked among the top 100 recruits in the country in high school. Yet injuries, illnesses, and inconsistency this season led to the team’s worst non-conference record in 10 years.

After losing to Yale in last year’s Ivy League tournament, the Crimson moved on—literally. Shortly after the season, the team vacated Lavietes Pavilion to facilitate the last stage of its two-year renovation. In the fall, the team returned to a modern facility: a video board, a new floor, and new locker rooms and coaches’ offices.

Stemberg coach Tommy Amaker emphasized the importance of making upgrades that would “excite and energize.” “What would make it even better,” he added, “is if we can win here.”

In their first two games, the team did just that. First, it knocked off MIT. Then the Crimson—picked first in the Ivy pre-season poll—defeated the University of Massachusetts in overtime. The star of that game was Bryce Aiken ’20, who tallied 30 points, including a game-winning three with two seconds left. “This game showed that our team matured a lot,” said Aiken, one of four sophomore starters. “I don’t know what would have happened if we were in this position last year.”

That confidence soon dissipated. The Crimson lost six games on an eight-game road trip that began at Holy Cross, where the team fell behind 12-2 and lost 73-69. A frustrated Amaker benched the starters for a matchup two days later at Manhattan College. The strategy backfired, though; the Crimson fell behind by 18 points and lost by four. The team’s poor starts reflected a bigger challenge. “Youth,” Amaker said, “is always probably synonymous with inconsistency.”

The next chance to build momentum came over Thanksgiving, when Harvard traveled to California for the Wooden Legacy tournament. Unfortunately, the Crimson took an 89-71 opening-round loss to then-twenty-first-ranked St. Mary’s College, and numerous players caught a virus that swept through the event. Amaker to bench the starters again. It concerned about the team’s focus—and led Amaker to bench the starters again. It also highlighted other issues. One was weak shooting. As of January 17, the Crimson had gotten rattled on the road.

The schedule left little time to recuperate: after the Thursday-evening loss to Northwestern, the squad traveled to then-seventh-ranked Kentucky for a Saturday matinee matchup. The Crimson played hard in a competitive 79-70 loss—especially Towns, who scored 25 points and sank six three-pointers. Forward Weisner Perez ’19 recalled that the strong performance against a top team prompted Amaker to tell the team that they had a “clean slate.”

That sentiment helped to carry the Crimson four days later in a two-point victory at Fordham. Towns sank a trey with nine seconds remaining to give the Crimson their first lead. He then got back on defense and forced Fordham’s leading scorer into an off-balance miss.

After a two-week break in December for exams, Harvard posted a 74-63 home win against Boston University, pushing their post-Kentucky record to 2-0. But then the Crimson dropped three games (at George Washington and Minnesota and at home against Vermont) in a streak that renewed concerns about the team’s focus—and led Amaker to bench the starters again. It also highlighted other issues. One was weak shooting. As of January 17, the Crimson had the lowest field-goal and three-point shooting percentages in the league. Another was the absence of Aiken, who missed six of seven games with a knee injury. Without their leading scorer, Harvard

Seth Towns ’20 is one of the team’s most versatile offensive threats.

Against the Huskies, the Crimson trailed 32-11 and lacked the energy and balance (Aiken and Lewis combined for more than three-quarters of the team’s points) to sustain a comeback. The Crimson also had five turnovers in the first four minutes—the young team had gotten rattled on the road.

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had the league’s worst scoring offense.

The silver lining was the conference’s best defense. That strength was on display in Harvard’s Ivy opener against Dartmouth. The Crimson limited the Big Green to just 19 first-half points and won 61-51.

The defense also kept the team competitive in its non-conference finale, a 63-62 setback at Wofford College. Still, the team struggled to make plays to win. After Towns tied the score on a tough hook shot with just under a minute left, Harvard gave up two offensive rebounds before committing a foul that allowed Wofford to inch ahead on a free throw. The game ended after Towns missed a driving layup.

Then the team won four of five taut conference road games. It pulled out a 62-57 overtime win at Dartmouth before sweeping Yale and Brown by single digits. And after falling to Columbia in Manhattan, Harvard came from behind to defeat Cornell 76-73.

After losing so many close games earlier in the year, what had changed? First, Towns was excelling. Through February 4, he led the league in scoring in conference play. Another factor was improved shooting: as of early February, Harvard had the best three-point field-goal percentage in the league. Finally, the team was making smart plays. At Yale, with just over two minutes remaining and the score tied at 49, Justin Bassey ’20 faked his defender into the air and was fouled beyond the three-point line. He sank all three free throws to give the Crimson a lead it would not relinquish.

Aiken’s health remained a concern. After returning against Yale, he aggravated his injury at Columbia and sat out at Cornell. Still, that the Crimson had won five of its first six league games (five on the road) suggested the team was learning to navigate what Amaker called the “fine line” between winning and losing.

The women’s basketball team returned four starters from last year’s squad, which

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Harvard Magazine
A star pitcher and hitter for the University knows how to pull greatness out of us.”

“Coach is the thread that connects all of us.”

“Make our best friends on the softball team, we have a strong culture,” Allard says. “Without it, the wins on the field don’t mean as much—and there are fewer of them. She figured this out during the 2006 season, a low point on the stats sheet, when the team went 20-24 and finished out of the top three in the league. There were illnesses and injuries and other issues, and for Allard, something shifted. ‘I learned a lot by then about how to coach the game, the strategy, putting players together, developing skills, all the technical pieces,’ she says. ‘What I’ve really learned since is character and development, and the whole person.’ A decade later, she says, ‘The players hand that down to each other.’

Not that her demands aren’t high, on and off the field. She expects hard work and good behavior, selflessness and supportiveness. ‘I tell my players, ‘My job isn’t to make your life easy; my job is to make your life better.’ So, knowing what you’re capable of doing and helping you get there...There are times when I’ve got to push you, because I know you can get to another gear.”