Helping Housing
The Harvard Local Housing Collaborative—involving $20 million in revolving University loan funds used to support affordable housing in what remains one of the nation’s most expensive residential real-estate markets—has been renewed. Created in 2000 and previously renewed, it has enabled partners—the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, BlueHub Capital, and the Cambridge Affordable Housing Trust—to preserve and create 7,000-plus units of affordable housing.

Social-Club-Sanctions Lawsuit
Harvard’s motion to dismiss a December 2018 lawsuit challenging as discriminatory on the basis of gender the 2016 policy that sanctions students for belonging to unrecognized single-gender social organizations (final clubs, fraternities, and sororities), has been effectively denied. In an August opinion, U.S. district judge Nathaniel M. Gorton found that three plaintiffs lacked standing, but that the remaining litigants were entitled to proceed. In his opinion, the judge observed that “it is impossible for Harvard to apply its policy without considering both the sex of the particular student and the sex of other students with whom he or she seeks to associate.” The plaintiffs “have alleged a plausible claim for associational discrimination under Title IX” and “have alleged facts sufficient to state a plausible claim under a theory of gender stereotyping,” justifying a trial of the issues—and suggesting at least some problems for Harvard’s defense.

The Public Pulse
Pollsters continue to plumb polarized opinions about higher education. The Pew Research Center’s August survey reported “an undercurrent of dissatisfaction—even suspicion—among the public about the role colleges play in society; the way admissions decisions are made; and the extent to which free speech is constrained on college campuses” (on the latter, see page 18).

Dr. Nguyen named to Harvard post
Giang T. Nguyen has been appointed executive director of Harvard University Health Services (HUHS), which provides care to students and to faculty and staff members who choose it for their health benefits. A family-medicine practitioner, he has been executive director of the Student Health Service and clinical associate professor of family medicine and community health at the University of Pennsylvania. The Harvard announcement emphasized Nguyen’s role in forming collaborations to focus on “racial and ethnic minorities, immigrants, and LGBTQ populations, particularly transgender people,” and noted that an early priority in his new post, which he assumes November 18, will be working with schools to effect the work of the University-wide task force on student mental health. He succeeds Paul Barreira, who remains at Harvard working on graduate-student mental health.

Those views are highly polarized, with 59 percent of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents saying higher education has a negative impact on society. From 2012 to 2018, reflecting rising Republican antipathy, the share of Americans saying colleges and universities have a negative effect increased from 26 percent to 38 percent; the views of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents have remained stable and “overwhelmingly positive.” Pew also found majority support (52 percent) for more federal spending on scientific research, with Democrats more favorable than Republicans—but greater support across the spectrum compared to the recession-recovery year of 2013. And a New America survey found general support for postsecondary education, especially as a preparation for work, but with ideological differences in how the cost is borne: Republicans emphasized individuals paying their own way; Democrats favored public financing of what they see as a social good.

Ratings Game
The annual U.S. News & World Report beauty contest again ranked Princeton as the top university, followed by Harvard and a three-way tie among Columbia, MIT, and Yale. Williams again was the magazine’s top liberal-arts college, followed by Amherst and a tie between Swarthmore and Wellesley. The top three campuses in its new “social mobility” ranking were the University of California’s Riverside, Santa Cruz, and Irvine campuses. The Wall Street Journal crowned Harvard, MIT, and Yale as its top three schools. Separately, The Boston Globe noted that private institutions’ sticker prices (total cost of attendance) now exceed $70,000—a deterrent to many applicants, even though financial aid reduces the average cost per student dramatically.

Around Academia
MIT’s The Engine—a longer-term venture-capital firm for difficult-to-build enterprises (in fields like energy from fusion, which need lots of capital and time to progress)—is leasing a 200,000-square-foot space, aiming to host 100 or more companies. MIT has invested $25 million in the...
PUBLIC-SERVICE PAIR: Deepening its investment in broader and more academically connected public-service programs, the College has appointed Warren professor of the history of American education Julie Reuben the inaugural faculty director of the Phillips Brooks House Center for Public Service and Engaged Scholarship (PBHHC) and Travis Lovett the assistant dean of civic engagement and service. Much student public volunteering has traditionally been channeled through extracurricular-service activities, in Boston and Cambridge, conducted under the Phillips Brooks House Association’s (PBHA) aegis. The faculty directorship points toward student involvement in faculty members’ service-oriented research, and courses with service experiences. The assistant deanship encompasses the many, diverse service opportunities throughout Harvard, beyond PBHA. Read a full report at harvardmag.com/publicservice-leaders-19.

for-profit venture, now capitalized at more than $200 million. The College Board has pulled back from its single-factor “adversity index”—intended to give colleges more information about applicants’ background, alongside their SAT scores. Instead, it will provide data about their high schools and neighborhoods: separate gauges of socioeconomic status. Among the members of Yale College’s class of 2023 are 20 New Haven students—13 of them from public schools; 11 of the 20 had participated in its “pathways” programs, which immerse high-school students in on-campus science or arts and humanities learning experiences with faculty members and Yale students. Separately, that university, in the quiet phase of a capital campaign, reported $826.8 million in gifts and pledges during the past fiscal year, its second-highest fundraising total ever. Moody’s Investors Service maintained its negative outlook for higher-education finances, as competition for students and the costs of making attendance affordable keep pressure on revenues.

Nota Bene

FENCING’S NEW FACE. Daria Schneider has been appointed head coach of the men’s and women’s fencing programs. The position was vacated when Peter Brand was dismissed for violating the conflict-of-interest policy (News Briefs, September-October, page 33). Schneider fenced sabre at Columbia, and began her coaching career there in 2010; she was head coach at Cornell for three years, before her move from the Big Red to the Crimson.

Minister for the moment. Stephanie Paulsell, Swartz professor of the practice of Christian studies, is interim Pusey Minister in the Memorial Church. She succeeds the Reverend Jonathan L. Walton, now dean of Wake Forest’s divinity school. A search for a permanent successor is underway. Read more at harvardmag.com/paulsell-19.

MacArthur Fellows: The MacArthur Foundation’s 2019 “genius grant” recipients include Baird professor of science Jerry X. Mitrovica, a geophysicist whose research focuses on climate change; philosopher Elizabeth Anderson, Ph.D. ’87; attorney and restorative-justice practitioner Sujatha Baliga ’93; marine scientist Stacy Jupiter ’97; and urban designer Emmanuel Pratt, a 2017 Loeb Fellow at the Design School (see harvardmag.com/macarthurs-19).

Top teachers. Star associate professor of stem cell and regenerative biology Ya-Chich Hsu and assistant professor of studies of women, gender, and sexuality Durba Mitra (Harvard Portrait, September-October 2018, page 17) have been named this year’s Roslyn Abramson Award winners, conferred on junior faculty members for excellence in undergraduate teaching.

Architects of record. Among the five winners of Architectural Record’s 2019 Women in Architecture Award are the Graduate School of Design’s Sharon Johnston, professor in practice of architecture, and Toshiko Mori, Hubbard professor in the practice of architecture.

Plant humanities, urban landscapes. Dumbarton Oaks, building on its research and collections in Byzantine, Pre-Columbian, and landscape-architecture studies (see page 88), has launched Plant Humanities Fellowships, supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, to encourage scholarship melding science, art, history, and digital humanities, drawing on rare books and manuscripts, herbaria specimens, and scholarly literature. Separately, Mellon has funded a three-year program on democracy, race, and difference, broadening a Dumbarton Oaks research initiative on urban landscape studies and environmental histories.

Miscellany. Harvard Law School has formally launched its Animal Law and Policy Clinic; some of the legal issues in the field and scholars involved were addressed in “Are Animals ‘Things’?” (March-April 2016, page 40). Concluding 31 years of service in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences’ Office of Gift Planning, executive director Peter Kimball retired in early October. He handled gifts including a Stradivarius violin, oriental carpets, polo ponies, and a Frank Lloyd Wright house, along with, you know, financial assets....Dartmouth paid $14 million to settle a sexual-harassment lawsuit brought by nine current and former students who alleged misconduct by their former psychology professors, whose tenure and appointments were terminated in 2018. The payment is among the largest paid in such cases by a higher-education institution...Nancy J. Brown, M.D. ’86, chair of the department of medicine at Vanderbilt, has been appointed dean of Yale School of Medicine, effective February 1; she studied molecular biophysics and biochemistry as a Yale undergraduate.