



Joseph P. Nye

the master's of public administration in international development. Incoming students (boasting an average score of 750 on the Graduate Record Exam), combine "calculus-based mathematics with practical field work in developing countries," says Nye. The program, "designed to train people for work in finance ministries, ministries of development, the World Bank,

and so forth, has been a great success." As a result, the school's student population is slightly larger, but the quality of the students (as measured on the GRE) has risen. Nye attributes this to an increased interest in public affairs. (Even within the ranks of Kennedy School students, interest in public service has grown in recent years: 80 percent of alumni now pursue service in government or the nonprofit sector, he says.)

As dean of Harvard's most international school (more than 40 percent of the students come from abroad), Nye has increased the emphasis on public leadership. "We started with one course on leadership, and now there are half a dozen," he says. He has also encouraged interdisciplinary research of practical relevance to the solution of public problems. "Visions of Governance for the 21st Century," a faculty

research collaboration established by Nye, has already produced several books.

What's left to do? "Lots," says Nye. "I'd like to see us do more in the area of information technology...to increase our study of how [it] affects the processes of democratic government [and] to explore the use of distance learning" and how to "combine it with what we do here in Cambridge." He'd like more research on how health-care and biotechnology are affecting public policy. Finally, says Nye, "we need to do more for undergraduates," an idea cited as "an area for exploration" in the school's most recent five-year plan. The possibilities range from making cross-registration easier, to a certificate program, to a possible joint program leading to some form of degree. But "each dean," he notes "brings his or her own perspective" about what is important.

When his deanship ends, Nye will return to research and teaching as Price professor of public policy at the Kennedy School. (He taught a very popular undergraduate Core course on international conflict before he left for Washington, D.C.) He will also continue writing—his book *Soft Power*, about getting the outcomes you want through attraction, will be published in the spring. "Somebody once said that being a professor is the best job at a University because you have all the irresponsibility," he joked. "I'm looking forward to the irresponsibility."

Close Contact

Students and scholars, one on one

THE COLLEGE-COUNSELING SUITE in my high school, with its brochure-laden atrium, drawers of student files, and closed-door conferences, reminded me of a doctor's office as I sat waiting to discuss my educational future for the first time. After I had faced the walls' awkward silence for a few moments, my counselor entered and began to chat about a framed photograph on his desk: a sure sign, I thought, that the ensuing conversation would be terribly important. But rather than pose a barrage of questions about the sort of college experience I hoped to find, he took a short stack of index cards from his desk and handed them to me. I was

to sort the cards—each bearing one possible characteristic of an undergraduate experience—into three piles: what was very important to me, somewhat important, and not especially important. He left the room. I moved briskly through the cards, building three stacks on the seat of a nearby chair and tapping a few against my knee as I weighed their value. Soon I had come to the item that I had been seeking most: "contact with professors." I immediately dropped the card onto the "most important" pile.

By that time, I had spent nearly three years at a small private high school in San Francisco and was accustomed to walking

into my teachers' offices regularly to discuss a draft, garner recommendations for further reading, or simply talk about an idea. I knew the sequence of spines on each teacher's bookshelf, who among them had seen Tom Stoppard's new play at the local repertory theater, and which English teacher had a semi-surreptitious penchant for Wittgenstein. I had learned as much, if not more, in my teachers' offices as in their classrooms, and I felt certain that I wanted to sustain this mode of education through my college years.

When I met with my counselor again a week later, he had drafted a list of 10 or 15 colleges that fit my criteria. We discussed each of them, and he grouped some by characteristics: "Yale, Princeton, or any of the smaller colleges would all be places where

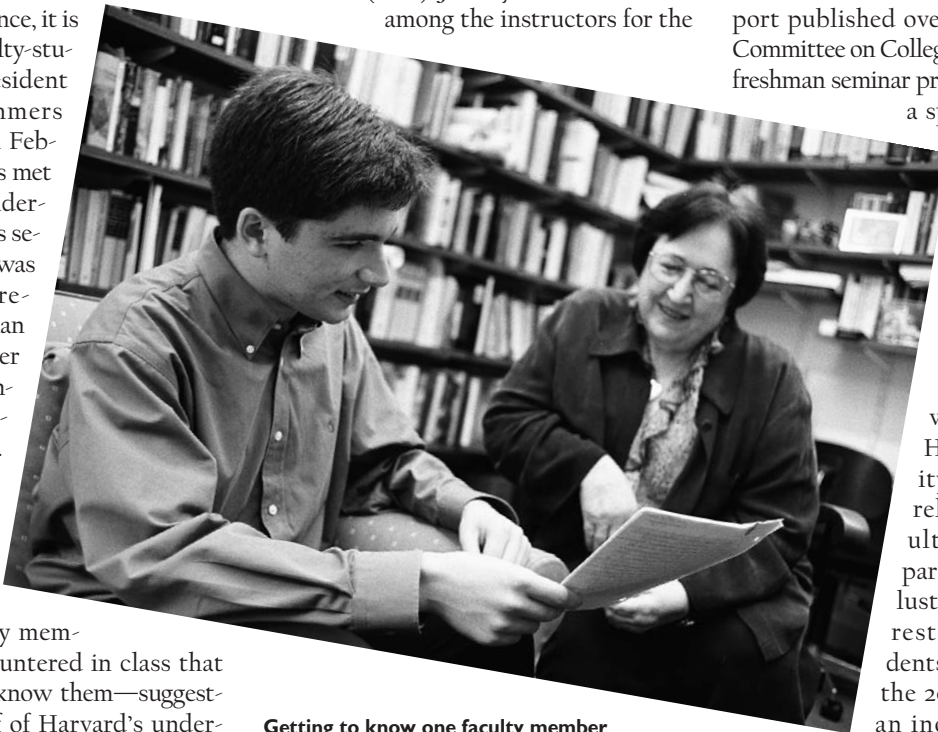
you could easily have direct interaction with faculty members," he said. I remember noting that he did not include Harvard among its Ivy peers in this category.

Whether his omission was deliberate or accidental, it was a fair exclusion at the time. Throughout my senior year of high school, alumni of other colleges wooed my peers and me by insisting they'd had far more direct contact with their professors than any Harvard student ever would. "If there is an Achilles heel in the Harvard experience, it is with respect to faculty-student contacts," President Lawrence H. Summers told *Business Week* in February 2002. Summers met with a group of undergraduates the day his selection as president was announced and reported that more than half of them had never had a 30-minute conversation with a senior faculty member. In a College survey taken in 2001, 42 percent of the respondents reported that two or fewer of the faculty members they had encountered in class that year had gotten to know them—suggesting that nearly half of Harvard's undergraduates were virtually anonymous to three-quarters of their teachers.

After visiting in the spring of my junior year of high school, though, I fell in love with Harvard: with the cacophony of the Square, with the sanctity of the University's massive libraries, and with the verve of students sprinting across the shivering Yard between classes. Even so, I was afraid that coming to Cambridge might mean abandoning the possibility of learning from my teachers outside the classroom. I arrived at Harvard last fall certain that I would have to work tirelessly to develop relationships with my professors. In fact, the doors to their offices have yielded more readily than I expected.

AN EFFORT to improve contact between entering College students and Harvard's

faculty has been underway since the early 1960s: a special committee created the Freshman Seminar program to help foster such an intimate learning environment. The program was rejuvenated three years ago, and the number of these ungraded seminars offered by Harvard faculty members has more than tripled in the ensuing period. This year Summers, University provost Steven E. Hyman, and former dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS) Jeremy R. Knowles are among the instructors for the



Getting to know one faculty member reasonably well: Nathan Heller meets with Helen Vendler in her office at Barker Center.

103 seminar offerings. (Their respective topics are globalization, addiction, and when antibiotics fail.) The presence of these campus leaders in the program reflects a growing focus on the structure of Harvard's undergraduate education. The Pedagogy Working Group, a division of the curricular review process begun last year, has been investigating patterns of faculty and student interaction since the beginning of the fall term in response to concern that Harvard's undergraduates—who frequently write honors theses under the direction of the same graduate students who have corrected the assignments for most of their classes—may not be receiving the faculty attention they need.

Harvard's new interest in opportunities for student contact with tenure-track or "ladder" faculty members is not unique. The realization that such connections are the hallmark of a successful educational environment—sealed two years ago with the publication of professor of education Richard J. Light's *Making the Most of College: Students Speak Their Minds* (see "The Storyteller," January-February 2001)—has brought faculty interaction to the top of educational dockets nationwide. In a report published over the summer, Yale's Committee on College Education rejected a freshman seminar program, but designated a special administrative

officer to increase the number of small learning environments available to underclassmen, with different sorts of experiences for different subject areas.

With curricular review just beginning at Harvard, responsibility for finding a close relationship with faculty members here—particularly the more illustrious scholars—still rests mainly with students themselves. And as the 2001 survey suggests, an inordinate number of Harvard's bright and eager

undergraduates have traditionally fallen through the educational cracks.

Yet a safety net of sorts exists for those who seek it. A number of faculty members challenge Harvard's entrenched and impersonal teaching culture in their undergraduate classes. Several of my teachers departed from the standard course structure—biweekly lectures and a teaching-fellow-led section—in favor of smaller or more interactive programs. Some of my professors made periodic one-on-one meetings a course requirement. A few simply promoted student connections with faculty members to as many as would listen.

"Your job is to get to know one faculty member reasonably well each semester," Light told a lecture hall packed with first-

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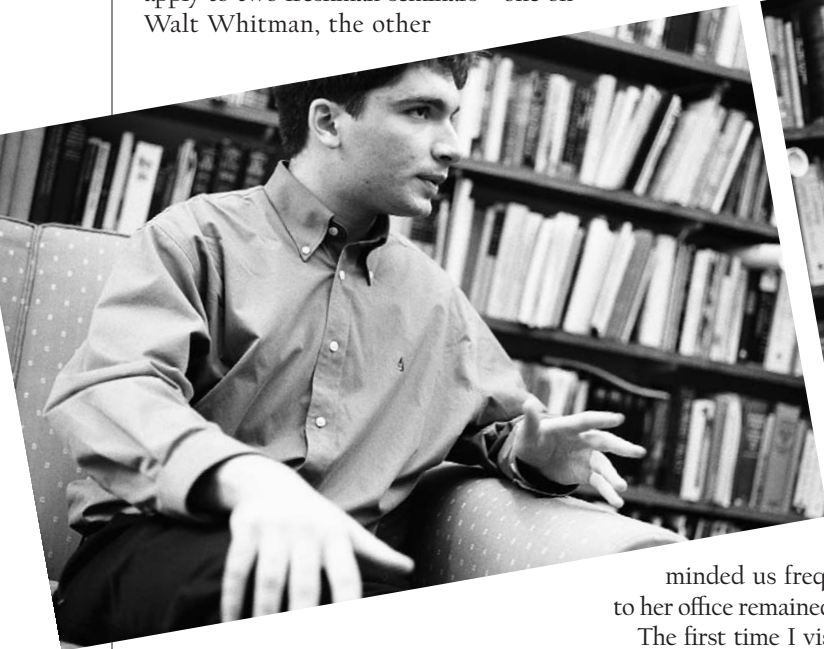
year students during orientation week last fall, "and to have that faculty member get to know you reasonably well." I took his instructions seriously. By the time I left the Science Center after his talk, my eyes were peeled for any friendly professors who might be wandering the warm September night.

"IT'S TYPICAL HARVARD," my academic adviser explained. "You all work incredibly hard to get here and, once you arrive, the first thing we have you do is apply all over again." Sitting in her Robinson Hall office during an orientation-week meeting, I had just declared that I intended to apply to two freshman seminars—one on Walt Whitman, the other

Helen Vendler, whom I had met on the page several years before I ventured into her classroom for the first time. Every Monday, when we gathered around an oblong table on the second floor of the Barker Center, Vendler would commence class with a question: "Which poem would you like to begin with?" We would read through each poem aloud, Vendler stopping to discuss the work word by word, to elicit our thoughts on the significance of a particular phrase. We submitted weekly assignments which she corrected herself, her tiny scrawl filling the margins and pooling at the bottom

novels she thought I ought to read. Three of her recommendations—J.M. Coetzee's *Boyhood*, Ford Maddox Ford's *Parade's End*, and a series of novels by Evelyn Waugh—I explored during subsequent trips to the library. The fourth I cannot remember; I absentmindedly interpolated the Post-it into the pages of some book on my shelf.

I'll come across it soon: opening my copy of Vendler's book on Seamus Heaney recently, I found a piece of notepaper bearing another recommendation, from my first-year adviser, an



on Shakespeare and James Joyce. That evening, my three roommates and I filled our overheated Straus Hall suite with the clatter of laptop keys as we made eleventh-hour additions to our applications. A few days later, three of us had garnered seats in seminars, a percentage roughly in line with the class as a whole: last year 1,226 of about 1,650 first-years submitted applications, and 755 enrolled in seminars. My fourth roommate, rejected from the seminar he had hoped to join, eventually found the learning environment he was seeking in an intensive Latin course attended mainly by graduate students.

I spent my first term at Harvard studying Whitman's poetry in a 13-person seminar led by Porter University Professor

of the page. She reminded us frequently that the door to her office remained open.

The first time I visited Vendler's office, lined with books and a mess of paper in desk cubbies, the doyenne of poetry criticism was trying to stave off a tremendous tickle in her throat. She rummaged briefly in a tiny refrigerator near her desk and, after offering me a Diet Coke, noisily snapped one open to quell her coughing. Over the course of the semester we discussed favorite poets, my musical interests, and the difference between poetic expression and fiction writing. I most enjoyed those discussions that touched on subjects in which Vendler was (or claimed to be) as much of a novice as I. A conversation on my final paper topic quickly transformed into a discussion about various novelists we appreciated. By the end of our meeting, she had listed on a yellow Post-it note some

assistant professor of American history: James Clifford's *The Predicament of Culture*. My education continues.

FORTUNATELY, my seminar experience with Vendler was not unique. Assistant professor of history Judith Surkis managed to bring the intimacy and variety of a seminar to her small lecture course on modern French history by incorporating several different media, including novels and a weekly film screening, into her lectures. She led discussion sections herself, rather than delegating the responsibility to a graduate student, exposing me, as a result, to some of the most exhilarating conversation I've known. Several discussions begun in the Boylston Hall classroom continued in her office, turning from course material to war protests and the present state of media coverage. I researched a paper on May 1968 and the Gaullist image under her guidance at the end of the term. Dashing across the fresh grass between Harvard's

libraries while clutching a few texts from relatively obscure French publishers was a thrilling experience for a first-year who had finished Expository Writing just four months earlier.

I grew familiar with other faculty offices, such as the paper-strewn quarters of senior preceptor in music John Stewart, who teaches a course on Bach-style chorale harmonization required of music concentrators but open to students throughout the College. In addition to leading interactive lectures twice a week, he spent every Wednesday playing through students' written work in a series of six-person sections, stopping to wince at an error, to suggest an improvement, or to note a similar passage recalled from his massive mental catalog of musical literature. As the year drew to a close, I peered over his shoulder as he read through a composition draft, scribbling notes in the margin with a red ballpoint, while seated at one of the two pianos he kept side by side behind his desk. For me at that moment, all of Harvard's vastness constricted to the space of his office.

But I have a confession to make. Early in the term of the one Core course I took last year, Pforzheimer University Professor Sidney Verba stood at the head of the room and pleaded with his students to visit him outside class. "Please come to office hours," he said. "I won't bite." In spite of better intentions, I never went to see him. I addressed my questions to the conscientious teaching fellow who led my section and, though I had planned to bounce some ideas off the professor, a busy semester swallowed up all but a few of the windows of time I had anticipated. Those I filled with other pursuits. Conventional criticism of weak interaction between students and faculty blames professors too busy or distracted to attend to their students outside the classroom. Given an undergraduate population as active and multifaceted as Harvard's, though, students themselves may not be blameless.

Yet the ongoing lament of Harvard's critics seems reasonable. The overall structure of undergraduate education—centered on the large lectures and graduate-student-led sections of the Core—is not conducive to intimate learning. Finding opportunities to make contact with

professors, particularly in the first year, does require a proactive outlook and, as with freshman seminars, competition. The number of chances to break from this pattern will probably increase as FAS continues to explore what learning means in a twenty-first-century college. In the meantime, with a bit of strategy—seeking small courses with strong teaching—and considerable luck, other students have

seen Harvard as I have: not as a massive university but as a personal and supportive college where illustrious scholars and eager students can sit together on a winter Thursday to share stories and music or discuss favorite books over Diet Coke.

~NATHAN HELLER

Nathan Heller '06 is a history and literature concentrator living in Currier House.

Life in Counterpoint

Pianist Berenika Zakrzewski '04 enjoys touring and tutorials—and meets a lot of pianos.

FEW HAVE EVER FACED the choice that Berenika Zakrzewski '04 had three years ago: Harvard or Juilliard? "It was exasperating," she says. "It wasn't choosing between a rock and a hard place, but two great places. Both are extremely competitive in admissions. I knew I wanted to be a concert pianist, so the natural path would be Juilliard—what else? Still, though lots of musicians don't take academics seriously, I do; like a lot of people at Harvard, I'm a bit of an overachiever. Now I look back on the decision and it seems tremendously easy."

Less easy is leading a multifaceted life as a Harvard undergraduate while ramping up her career as a professional musician. This summer Zakrzewski (pronounced *zak-SHEV-ski*) toured the largest concert halls of South America. She has already played Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall, soloed with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, and appeared widely on radio and television, including Bravo! and the BBC. In her native Poland, she has recorded Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3 with Cracow's Sinfonietta Cracovia; in New York City she played at St. Paul's Church for the firefighters and relief workers of Ground Zero; and at Harvard's Sanders Theatre she serenaded the inauguration of President Lawrence H. Summers.

"I'm a passionate performer, excited, energetic," she says. "I play as if I'm part of the instrument. I don't give the kind of performance where you can sit back and relax. People are affected by the music." Indeed, her big sound and unrestrained virtuosity seem to cry out for large venues. Last year, at a senior common

room dinner in Currier House (where she lived until transferring to Kirkland), she stunned an intimate audience with a powerful, fiery rendition of Chopin's Polonaise in F# Minor.

Each day she practices four to five hours on Kirkland House's Steinway and Bösendorfer pianos. Unlike rock musicians, concert pianists don't travel with a keyboard. "You don't choose your piano, you make the best of what you have," she says. "Unless you are super-duper famous, you get to meet a lot of pianos." Zakrzewski does own a nine-foot Baldwin Concert Grand SD-10, a gift from an anonymous patron of the arts when she was 13. That instrument is at home in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. "When I go there, I say hello," she says.

"I never miss practice," she declares. "I'm a really disciplined person. You have to be very efficient when you have the amount of homework Harvard gives you—plus catching up with what you miss when you travel"—about a month during the academic year. "I not only practice a lot, but I get good grades."

Zakrzewski's piano teacher and mentor is Robinson professor of music Robert Levin '68, whose performance course attracts undergraduate virtuosos (see "Musician with a Mission," May-June 1995, page 32). "We also talk about things like the order of pieces in a recital," she says. A music concentrator, she has soaked up coursework on the physics of sound and on composing and conducting in postwar Europe, which featured a visit from Pierre Boulez. She also relished a required survey course on the history of Western music.