

Enhancing the Student Experience

LAST YEAR, more than 80 percent of the applicants offered admission to the Class of 2016 chose to matriculate at Harvard College, a yield not seen at the University since 1971. It was a wonderful threshold to cross as I neared the end of my fifth year as president—an affirmation that the student experience at Harvard continues to be among the finest in the world. Speaking with freshmen throughout the fall semester, I found myself thinking about recent changes that have made attending the College even more appealing, as well as upcoming enhancements that will strengthen the residential learning environment for future generations.

Cost of attendance continues to be a central concern of many students and families. At a time of sustained economic uncertainty, Harvard has remained committed to pursuing excellence and expanding opportunity, complementary purposes advanced through the expansion of financial aid. Between 2007 and 2012, financial aid expenditures at the College grew from \$92 million to \$163 million. Today, more than 60 percent of undergraduates receive institutional grant aid, and the average family contribution of a student on financial aid is \$10,500. The ability to attract the most promising men and women regardless of their economic circumstances shapes the experiences of all students, challenging them to think about their beliefs, their lives, and their world in different ways.

The Program in General Education, launched in 2009, connects liberal arts education to life in the twenty-first century. At the same time, students in the College are able to take advantage of intellectual resources of the broader University. Last year, faculty from across our graduate and professional schools taught 40 Gen Ed courses on topics such as entrepreneurship, K-12 education reform, and the evangelical tradition in America. The most popular “secondary field” or minor, currently enrolling 193 undergraduates, is Global Health and Health Policy, which draws on faculty from the Kennedy School, the Medical School, and the School of Public Health, as well as 22 departments in FAS. Collaborations with the Medical School also have enabled new concentrations in biomedical engineering and stem cell and regenerative biology.

In addition to more than 40 secondary fields of study and 48 concentrations, students have access to a remarkable array of extracurricular opportunities. As one student recently said to me, “you can do anything you love here.” From directing an original production at Farkas Hall to attending a Start-Up Scramble at the new Innovation Lab to tutoring local students at the Harvard Allston Education Portal, undergraduates explore their diverse interests with zeal. Supported by a variety of generous gifts to make international experiences possible for all our students, hundreds of undergraduates travel far afield each year, immersing themselves in unfamiliar cultures and languages to deepen their understanding of the connections and complexities that will shape their futures.



All of these roads, of course, lead back to the House system, a distinctive aspect of our educational mission and the heart of the student experience. When I meet with College alumni, I often find that their fondest Harvard memories are House memories: conversations concluded in the early morning hours, first meetings turned lifelong friendships, and beloved traditions adopted and adapted. The renewal of the nearly century-old Houses, a process that began this past summer with the commencement of work on Old Quincy, will ensure the endurance of one of our great treasures over the next 100 years. These improvements will coincide with the development of new social spaces for students and common spaces for the University as a whole, including Science Center Plaza renovations that will be completed by the spring.

Each year as Commencement approaches, I meet with a group of seniors who share with me their reflections on their years in the College and their plans for the future. Last year, when asked what was most daunting about imagining life after graduation, one young woman told the group she was concerned about having to choose which of her interests to pursue, a problem she had not faced as an undergraduate. This response, for me, encapsulates the student experience at Harvard: a period of freedom to pursue passions, to discover new avenues of inquiry, and to learn more both about oneself and about the world.

Sincerely,