

University People

Dunster Departures

Dunster House faculty deans Roger B. Porter, IBM professor of business and government, and Ann Porter announced in early March that they would step down at the end of this academic year, concluding 16 years of service. They took the House, and its students and staff, through the first whole-House renewal, under the continuing renovation program (reported in detail at harvardmag.com/new-dunster-15).

Dean Dench

With Xiao-Li Meng, Jones professor of statistics, taking sabbatical during the 2017-2018 academic year, Emma Dench, McLean professor of ancient and modern history and of the classics, will assume his administrative role as dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS) on

an interim basis. She has been director of graduate studies for the classics department, and in 2015 won a faculty prize for mentoring graduate students. Meng is pursuing research pertinent to statistics and data science, and assuming leadership roles in two statistics professional societies during the year. One statistic he leaves to interim dean Dench: the planned reduction in the size of the entering GSAS cohort, for financial reasons (see below).

Labor Leaders...

President Donald J. Trump has nominated Alexander Acosta '90, J.D. '94—the dean of Florida International University Law School and a former member of the National Labor Relations Board (among other public-service roles) as U.S.

Secretary of Labor....Separately, Sharon Block, who had been principal deputy assistant secretary for policy and senior counselor to the secretary at the Department of Labor under President Barack Obama, J.D.



Alexander Acosta

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

'91, has been appointed executive director of Harvard Law School's Labor and Worklife Program, which focuses on labor law, training union leaders, and related issues.

...and Other D.C. News

Tom Perez, M.P.P.-J.D. '87, who served as Secretary of Labor in the Obama administration, has been elected chair of the Democratic National Committee and charged with revitalizing the party....Separately, President Trump's initial choice to be Secretary of the Navy, private-equity executive Philip Bilden, M.B.A. '91, took himself out of the running, citing financial and family obligations.



Tom Perez

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

WRITERS' REWARDS: Coolidge professor of history Maya Jasanoff, author of the National Book Critics Circle-winning *Liberty's Exiles*, on loyalists during the American Revolution, has been awarded a Windham-Campbell Prize, created to support writers and administered by Yale; it comes with a \$165,000 honorarium. Her next book, *The Dawn Watch: Joseph Conrad in a Global World*, will be published in November....Separately, professor of history Jane Kamensky, Pforzheimer Foundation Director of the Radcliffe Institute's Schlesinger Library, has received the New-York Historical Society's \$50,000 annual book prize in American history for *A Revolution in Color: The World of John Singleton Copley*. "Facing Harvard" (November-December 2016, page 42), on Copley's Harvard portraits, complements her research for the book.



Maya Jasanoff

ROSE LINCOLN/HPAC

Graduate Admissions in Lower Gear

THE HARVARD CRIMSON reported in mid February that the number of admissions to the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS) would be reduced 4.4 percent, affecting students seeking to enroll this coming fall. The reduction reflects an adjustment by the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS) to the prospective flattening of the distribution of funds from the endowment, the faculty's largest source of revenue, following recent weak investment results (see "The Endowment Ebbs," November-December 2016, page 18). The newspaper quoted

FAS dean Michael D. Smith as attributing the downsizing to "the flat endowment distribution that we will see next year and the drying up of some funds that we've used in the past to help admit some students," whose education and living expenses are typically covered by the University.

A statement provided by FAS elaborated that the GSAS "is fundamentally committed to ensuring that current graduate students thrive during their time at Harvard.... Most Ph.D. students now receive a generous financial-aid package guaranteed for at least five years, which pays for tuition, fees, health insurance, and other benefits." It also cited recent improvements in support, including,

among other steps: summer research funding, fifth-year and dissertation-completion support, professional-development funding, and financial assistance for students expecting or adopting a child.

"In the process of developing the fall 2017 admissions targets in conjunction with the graduate financial-aid budget," the statement continued, "it became clear that a modest year-over-year reduction in class size would be necessary in order to ensure no disruption of support for current students," driven in part by the endowment results. "GSAS, the FAS dean, the [engineering and applied sciences] dean, the FAS divisional deans, and the offices of the president and provost worked

together to ensure the smallest possible percentage reduction in admission targets for FAS-based Ph.D. programs.”

Two points merit consideration. First, this does *not* appear to be an effort to downsize certain graduate programs where demand for academic hiring has diminished (notably, the humanities, languages, history, and related fields)—a subject of understandable anxiety within the affected fields.

Second, exactly how GSAS sets its admissions targets is as much an art as a science. Some tiny doctoral programs admit one or two candidates annually; others welcome scores. The yearly allocation varies by program, prior enrollment yields among those admitted, new faculty appointments (and leaves and retirements), funding vicissitudes, and so on. For whatever reason, GSAS is providing only the percentage guidance on admissions overall—not specifying how many new graduate students it aims to admit, nor the absolute change from last fall or any differential effects among disciplines. At least in the near term, College officials have said that the reduced graduate-student cohort should not

have any effect on the availability of teaching assistants or section sizes.

A final observation: this outcome illustrates the overwhelming importance of the endowment in funding the University and FAS (which derived 51 percent of its operating income from endowment distributions in fiscal year 2016). Even in a period when The Harvard Campaign has raised well more than \$7 billion in new gifts and pledges, core academic operations remain vulnerable to persistently weak endowment earnings. —J.S.R.

Allston Ambitions

HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL (HBS) dean Nitin Nohria's annual letter to his faculty is especially interesting this year. The headline item—that HBS exceeded its \$1-billion capital campaign goal in 2016, and formally raised it by \$300 million—matters less than the intended aims: more associate professorships and practitioner-teachers; more fellowships; further flexible funding for innovation; and “realizing the vision of One Harvard by supporting work across the University and...in Allston.” The latter may point to deepening engagement with the School of Engineering

and Applied Sciences (see “Academic Allston, At Last,” July-August 2016, page 22), and perhaps HBS support for the proposed Gateway research building and data sciences, of import to both faculties (see page 27).

Nohria also addressed the migration of the school's experience-based FIELD curriculum into the fall and spring M.B.A. courses of study; rapid change in executive education; and a goal of making the online HBX operation “cash-flow positive by 2019.” (Given that HBX collects tuition for its courses—\$1,950 for the three-unit basic business-skills sequence—this hints at the costs of such offerings, and perhaps the continued reliance on philanthropy to support the University's HarvardX online courses; see next item.)

Nohria also observed that the academic gaps between men and women in the M.B.A. program, and their different levels of satisfaction, had been closed. He identified the need for additional support for students who receive financial aid, and highlighted a fiftieth-anniversary celebration of the African-American Student Union, in 2018. —J.S.R.

Online Updates

THE ONLINE version of “Super-Earths and Life,” by Phillips professor of astronomy Dimitar Sasselov, director of Harvard's Origins of Life Initiative (see “Life's Beginnings,” September-October 2013, page 29), is the first HarvardX course to incorporate adaptive-learning technology that tailors content and exercises to student mastery of material. Early assessments demonstrate clear gains in learning and students' speed through the course.

Turning to revenue-producing online programs: Georgia Tech has introduced a second, lower-cost master's degree, in analytics, complementing its popular computer-science degree launched in 2014. Meanwhile, edX members including Boston University and Penn rolled out 16 more blended online and in-person “micromasters”—in career-oriented fields like data science, business analytics, and cybersecurity—bringing the roster of such revenue-generating courses to several dozen.

Inside Higher Ed reported that Simmons College, in Boston, has increased online revenue from \$5.4 million in the year ended June 30, 2014, to \$45 million in the most recent fiscal year—nearly equal to its classroom-based graduate tuition revenue, and closing in on undergraduate income. Master's programs in nursing and social work account for the

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