



JOHN HARVARD'S JOURNAL

Mastering the “Hidden Curriculum”

How some colleges help first-generation and low-income students succeed

A NEW STUDENT heard a classmate mention choosing a gift from a bridal registry for a friend. “What the hell is a bridal registry?” she wondered. As she tried to choose courses, she had to visit the library to explore what unfamiliar subjects *were*, before registering—painfully aware that fellow freshmen “had gone to high schools that sounded more like mini-colleges, with library buildings of their own and sophisticated electives” and AP courses that enabled them “to leapfrog ahead” of her introductory selections. “Maybe I just wasn’t as smart as they were?” She certainly wasn’t as moneyed, as the weekly letter from her grand-

mother, containing a dollar bill, reminded her. Over time, she recalled,

I came to accept during my freshman year that many of the gaps in my knowledge and understanding were simply limits of class and cultural background, not lack of aptitude or application as I’d feared. That acceptance, though, didn’t make me feel less self-conscious and unschooled in the company of classmates who’d had the benefit of much more worldly experience. Until I arrived...I had no idea how circumscribed my life had been, confined to a community that was es-

entially a village in the shadow of a great metropolis....I was enough of a realist not to fret about having missed summer camp, or travel abroad, or a casual familiarity with the language of wealth....The agenda for self-cultivation that had been set for my classmates by their teachers and parents was something I’d have to develop for myself.

That was at Princeton in 1972, as Sonia Sotomayor depicted her student self in her memoir, *My Beloved World*. Develop herself she clearly did: she is now an associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Four decades later, at Princeton or almost any other elite college, Sotomayor’s experience likely would have unfolded similarly. Having diversified their student bodies by race, gender, ethnicity, and nationality since



THE OLD MADE NEW. Winthrop House, renovated and expanded, welcomed undergraduates back this fall. Those who still read books have a gorgeously refreshed library in which to do so. House amenities include this new rooftop terrace, and an extended terrace in the refurbished Gore Hall courtyard. The contractors have moved on to Lowell House, where the renewal will take two years (students are in swing spaces now; see *Brevia*, page 34, on the diaspora). Consult harvardmag.com/new-winthrop-17 for a full Winthrop tour.



the 1960s, highly selective universities began scrambling to address the one glaring omission that remains. After largely outsourcing the education of low-income and first-generation students to public institutions, they have made stronger efforts during the past decade to enroll academically strong students whose family incomes and K-12 preparation resemble Sotomayor's—far from the resources available in America's best suburban systems and prep schools. And most recently, these elite institutions have begun to recognize that gaining admission is only the *first* challenge many such students face.

Although first-generation and low-income status often overlap, not all FLI undergraduates (to use Princeton's acronym) have come from under-resourced secondary schools. Anthony Jack, a Junior Fellow who will join the Harvard Graduate School of Education faculty, distinguishes those who attended superb magnet schools or won

scholarships to, say, Exeter, from those who did not (see "Aiding the 'Doubly Disadvantaged,'" September-October 2016, page 11). But beginning undergraduates who attended the weakest public schools, urban and rural—lacking AP courses or calculus, science labs or instruction in writing—may now find even greater disparities than Sotomayor encountered. That is another reflection of widening American socioeconomic inequality in the intervening decades (see "The College Chasm," page 50).

The best evidence that Sotomayor's anecdotes resonate today comes from Rachel L. Gable, Ed.D. '16, in her doctoral dissertation, "Pathways to Thriving: First- and Continuing-Generation College Student Experiences at Two Elite Universities." Forty years after Sotomayor's affirmative-action cohort,



Rachel L. Gable

Gable surveyed Harvard and Georgetown sophomores about their academic preparation compared to peers'. First-generation students were more than *twice* as likely to feel less prepared than continuing-generation students (with college-educated family members). And by their senior year, after encountering higher-level concentration courses and independent work, that gap *widened*: 57 percent of first-gen students felt less prepared than peers, versus just 20 percent among the continuing-generation cohort.

How, then, do colleges that admit such students help them thrive once they arrive on campus—for many, their first trip away from family and home? Some institutions offer late-summer orientations. Others have multiweek academic immersions—accompanied by guidance about university norms

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such as office hours and seeking academic help, and discussions about being a first-gen or low-income student surrounded by wealthier peers and legacies. Increasingly,



**Burgwell
Howard**

COURTESY OF BURGWELL HOWARD

to attend First-Year Scholars at Yale (FSY): a five-week summer experience on campus combining coursework with introductions to the community and its resources that turned out to be “a really big deal.”

Now a junior and a residential counselor for the 2017 FSY cohort, this summer López saw some of what he learned reflected in them: “It’s very tempting for them to ‘present’ themselves and not be honest” about their backgrounds as they try to adapt to their new circumstances—an adjustment that can “take a lot of energy, emotional and mental.” Embedding in FSY, he said, enables participants to share what a student in 2013, the inaugural year, called “an invisible kind of identity.”

For John Kauffman, another residential counselor, the academic menu—a for-credit, summer-school version of the freshman writing class, plus advising on quantitative studies—“was by far the most important aspect” of FSY. In his rural high school, outside Chicago, there was “no one to ask” about Ivy League expectations (few students had ever enrolled), and long writing assignments were three pages (with little, if any, revision). Freshman fall, he elected to pursue Directed Studies, Yale’s reading- and writing-intensive Western Civ. immersion. Absent FSY’s course in “what it meant to write a college-level paper,” Kauffman, now a junior, said, “I would not have been able to survive D.S.”

Sophomore Hannah Nikole Almonte, born in the Philippines and raised in California, came to New Haven already confident about her reading and writing. For her, the workshops and “dean’s time” (conversations about issues the students would encounter and resources available to them) were the central FSY experience: learning to “deal with people from a different socioeconomic background” and “how to have conversations in suites” as a freshman. This past summer, she served as a tutor for ONEXYS, the online quantitative-reasoning course Yale has added to FSY—effectively doubling students’ class load, but a useful preview of the academic multitasking to come.

These stories align with two Yale College aims that converged in FSY. More than a decade ago, according to Burgwell Howard, senior associate dean and associate vice president of student life, planning began for two new residences and a 15 percent expansion in undergraduate enrollment—including more students who “have the in-

tellectual acumen” but lack the preparation that comes with attending “Andover or Dalton.” Conversations with undergraduates and alumni from first-gen and low-income backgrounds identified two focal points for such students’ success: familiarization with college life to minimize “culture shock,” and classes to bridge the academic gap between their high-school and college courses.

Jeremiah Quinlan, dean of undergraduate admissions, described the transition to college as a challenge for every student, all of whom therefore undergo orientation. A subset of 160 or so students take ONEXYS off-campus, to prepare for quantitative courses, and atop the pyramid is FSY, which enrolls 60.

President Peter Salovey and Quinlan, who both took office in 2013, have directed a shift in Yale’s “standard demographics,” increasing the share of matriculants eligible for Pell grants by about five percentage points. “We cannot make these changes without supporting the students once they get here,” Quinlan continued. Once applicants are ac-



April Ruiz

PAUL MCKINLEY

cepted, he and his staff review “the highest [financial] need students who went to high schools with lesser course offerings” to determine whom to invite to FSY.

Would they come? Howard noted practical obstacles: the students are being asked to leave their families before the fall term; they lose summer income; travel logistics may seem daunting. Yale accordingly helps to arrange the travel and covers travel and living expenses, eliminates the summer income requirement from financial-aid packages, and conveys the program’s seriousness by conferring full credit for the writing course. (None of this is cheap: Howard said the annual cost was in the six figures.)

such programs precede matriculation and continue through the undergraduate years.

This past summer, *Harvard Magazine* visited such efforts at Yale, Georgetown, and Princeton. The following account reflects reporting in the period between Harvard’s decision last winter *not* to initiate such a program (see harvardmag.com/firstgen-17) and College dean Rakesh Khurana’s August note to upperclassmen disclosing a 2018 pilot pre-orientation program aimed at “building community and fostering a sense of belonging among students from historically marginalized communities.” A September Harvard summit on “academic inclusion” in higher education, reported at harvardmag.com/inclusion-17, also addressed these issues.

“A place I could see myself in”

“THE ACADEMIC PART was not that much of a worry,” said José López. “I *knew* the academics would be difficult and challenging.” As one of four children of Mexican-immigrant parents living in a studio apartment in downtown Los Angeles, on a family income of less than \$20,000, his concerns were about “looking forward to making it a place I could see myself in.” For López, a first-generation student, the path toward belonging was an invitation, after he gained admission,

Most do attend, Howard said, and acquire “some social currency.” The trip to campus is less intimidating than if it immediately preceded matriculation. And FSY students, who have learned their way around campus, can then tell fellow freshmen to “follow me”—an advantage formerly confined to legacies. And, “They have a *group*.” Howard cited the Posse Foundation’s model of sending students to college together (see “Widening the College Pipeline,” July-August, page 63).

As the students themselves suggested, FSY seems to have been productive. Michael Fitzpatrick, Yale Summer Session’s associate director for academic affairs (and himself a low-income, first-gen student at Cornell), described two gains. First, students from under-resourced high schools are “probably less likely to ask for help.” (As Rachel Gable puts it, they need to know that in college—reversing their prior experience—studying with others and “seeking assistance is a habit of *excellence*, not a sign of weakness.”) FSY workshops, briefings with faculty members who describe their own experiences and invite students to office hours, and the classes themselves are structured to convey those messages. Second, the experience is designed to overcome “imposter syndrome”—the hoary admissions-mistake trope that looms larger for students whose material circumstances and preparation can suddenly seem so below the norm. Quinlan visits the FSY cohort to assure them, humorously, “The admissions office doesn’t make mistakes.” Students confirm gains in confidence on both counts.

Academically, FSY is both nascent and evolving. Prior results from ONEXYS showed statistically significant gains in learning, and subsequent gains in students’ grades, according to James Rolf, the mathematics instructor who developed it—hence its adoption by FSY (other colleges are considering using it, too). Further studies will monitor that effect, and determine whether taking the course correlates with students’ concentration choice. Quinlan said freshman-year data show that FSY students do better in writing and quantitative courses than peers who did not have the summer experience, and in their grades overall.

There may also be unquantifiable effects. José López, for example, admitted regrets about becoming a chemistry concentrator, despite feeling comfortable in the field. Recognizing that he was “among the very few

HARVARD PORTRAIT



Nicco Mele

Nicco Mele owes a lot to the Internet. The new director of the Kennedy School’s Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics, and Public Policy grew up across Asia and Africa—the son of two foreign-service officers—and first connected with American culture by checking baseball scores online. When he learned his future mother-in-law “had lived in the same house in South Orange for 35 years or something, [it was] the most exotic thing I’d ever encountered.” After majoring in government at William and Mary, he joined the rapidly expanding online organizing scene at Common Cause; he also worked on Howard Dean’s presidential campaign, and later, on Barack Obama’s 2004 Senate campaign. His wife, Morra, founded Women Online, a marketing organization that has worked with both Hillary Clinton and Obama. But instead of diving deeper into a career in politics, Nicco found satisfaction in a “selfish love of learning” by landing teaching jobs at Johns Hopkins and HKS, thanks to his expertise in the intersection of the Internet and politics. This expertise later drew him west to join the *Los Angeles Times* as deputy publisher in 2015. As one of the self-proclaimed earliest forecasters of Donald Trump’s success (he says it with sorrow, not *schadenfreude*), Mele has turned to the Internet once again to connect with the American public in what he calls “an extremely uncertain future” for democracy. The Shorenstein Center will play a critical role in preventing the rise of fake news, he claims, by helping audiences become smarter consumers of information online. The biggest challenge will be innovating to keep both sides of the political aisle engaged. “I’ve always been an entrepreneur. If I weren’t at Shorenstein, I’d still build some kind of business in the media space.” —OSET BABÜR

male Latinos in the sciences,” he’d felt pressure to proceed, sacrificing his passions for music and education. (Gable’s research revealed that first-gen students had greater difficulty choosing an academic field—for diverse reasons, like López’s.) Yet his continuing engagement with FSY and with friends from the program has helped put his choice into perspective and encouraged him to redirect it. He has added education courses to his studies, to prepare for work in schools—perhaps in his home community.

April Ruiz, dean of FSY and of the Hopper College residence (and a first-generation, low-income Yale graduate), said the cumulative effect was to give students the sense, “I am not weird.” Combining an “intentional academic component” with the equally “intentional creation of community,” she said, helped such students adapt to utterly new circumstances. Her weekly conversations with FSY students explored what it would feel like to balance four demanding college courses, pursue extracurriculars, manage time, and, generally, “take advantage of these privileged opportunities while the

folks at home never could—you advance, they don’t.” Along with the peer mentors like López, Kauffman, and Almonte, she sought to help the students understand both “how things work” and “how things feel” in a setting where some of them would have experiences as traumatic as “coming out as poor.”

The program aims to help the students understand both “how things work” and “how things feel.”

Quoting Ruiz’s predecessor, Howard said of those challenges, “Students should never struggle alone.”

“Roadblocks are not deficiencies”

IF YALE IS newly committed to supporting undergraduates from under-resourced high schools, Georgetown established the playbook.

• In 1968, amid the country’s convulsive urban traumas, it launched an effort to en-

roll and support underrepresented students—the forerunner of its Community Scholars Program (CSP), a summer academic immersion, like FSY, for 75 students.

• A Georgetown Scholars Program (GSP), launched in 2005 (a response to the Harvard Financial Aid Initiative and other well-endowed schools’ aid enrichments), increased

grants and reduced loans for targeted low-income students. It encompasses the CSPers and more than 150 undergraduates per class, and has transformed from extended financial aid to a four-year system of fostering first-gen and low-income students’ school engagement, leadership training, and other elements of success in college and beyond. They are supported by a five-person staff and alumni have responded with enthusiasm to a \$25-million fundraising campaign,

Public Health’s Past and Future

Michelle A. Williams attracted a great deal of attention last year when she was appointed dean of the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health (HSPH)—less for her career as a distinguished epidemiologist than because she is the first African American to lead a Harvard school. In person, her soft-spoken disposition doesn’t appear to invite public attention. Was the symbolism of her appointment personally important to her? “It was my first exposure to a massive amount of public attention,” she recalled at a recent interview in her Kresge Building office. “And it did set me back a little bit. So much focus on my race, my gender, and the fact that I’m foreign born” (her family emigrated from Jamaica to New York when she was a child). “I’m proud of all of those. If I can be a positive symbol, that it’s possible to overcome minority status and that there are no limits to the capacity to excel and achieve leadership roles at the highest institutions, then it’s important to me.”

Williams, who earned her Sc.D. in epidemiology from HSPH in 1991 and whose research has focused on maternal and infant health, assumed office last July, succeeding Gregory professor in cancer prevention emeritus David Hunter, who had temporarily taken up the post following the departure of Julio Frenk (now president of the University of Miami). HSPH had exceeded its capital campaign goal of \$450 million, thanks to an unrestricted \$350-million gift that transformed its financial structure—the largest-ever donation to a public-health school. Williams says the central goal of her tenure has been to use the gift to “position the

school to soar to even greater heights,” particularly as federal funding as a share of the school’s research funding has decreased. “It’s an urgent area of concern,” she said. “After the 2008 crisis, it became very evident that we as an institution had to work diligently to diversify our funding streams. Seventy-five percent of our funding comes from sponsored research; 85 percent of that comes from the federal government. We are the most dependent of the Harvard schools on federal funding.”

HSPH’s campaign aimed to position the school as a premier center of research into the determinants of human health in the twenty-first century: old and new global pandemics; harmful physical and social environments (including industrial pollution and gun violence); poverty and humanitarian crises; and failing global-health systems. Williams’s expertise at the intersection of epidemiology and biology, as well as her sensitivity to the social context of health, position her well to lead across those domains. The campaign also aimed to raise funding for new professorships, student financial aid, and renewal of the school’s infrastructure. The latter, according to Williams, might sound boring, but remains essential to promoting interdisciplinary work: “We’re spread out across 25 physical addresses, which means we don’t benefit from having the enormous talent represented in the school collocated in a way that fosters collaboration.”

To those ends, the naming Chan gift, along with new partnerships with the for-profit sector and foundations (what she called “non-traditional collaborators”), have augmented HSPH’s re-

for aid and the program itself.

• In addition, GSP students now organize a five-day pre-orientation Preparing to Excel Program (PEP), aimed at entering low-income and first-gen Hoyas (the template Harvard College now seems to be considering).

In August, during this year's PEP, former admissions officer Melissa "Missy" Foy, who launched the GSP, held an audience of first-year students rapt as she exposed their commonest anxieties, beginning with that imposter trope and assuring them, "You are sitting in a seat that was chosen for *you*." She then turned to tough love: "For students who are prideful about their writing, it's probably time to get over that." (But she also recalled a senior-year journalism assignment so egregious her instructor wrote "No!" in place of a letter grade, using her experience to illustrate overcoming an ego-deflating challenge.) Georgetown, she continued, is "supposed to be hard. If it's easy, you picked the wrong college." Working through their other inner thoughts, she detoxified fears by turning them into *community* concerns. That

emphasis on community runs throughout Georgetown's embrace of these students. The dean of student financial services, Patricia McWade, who addressed the PEPers, said separately that raising funds for GSP had been one of the greatest rewards of her quarter-century at Georgetown. Charles A. Deacon, the even longer-serving dean of admissions, who just admitted his forty-fifth class, said, "We have their back."

Through PEP and other channels, the students make unusual connections with the financial-aid representatives who help them manage their scholarships and loans (often without parental help), and their academic deans (who join the PEP cohort for a first-day lunch). Even more directly, charismatic staff members available 24/7, like Foy and Devita Bishundat, who directs CSP, put Georgetown into perspective. Senior Fabienne El-Cid—a GSP student-board member, peer-mentoring co-chair, and former PEP coordinator—said the activities collectively work "wonders in making the campus feel *smaller*, as you walk around it and recognize faces."

These forms of soft support, combined with the students' resilience and drive, are associated with tangible results in the classroom. During a morning session of CSP's critical reading and writing course, a student volunteered her draft for review—among the hardest experiences for most young learners to endure. Twenty minutes of peer critiques, kindly expressed but tough and extensive, ensued. Their recipient then thanked everyone and said she looked forward to incorporating their suggestions in her revision. Most teachers of undergraduates would testify to how much they would value the kind of learning such give-and-take enables for everyone in a class. (The writing class continues into the fall, with the same teachers, and students take a second summer course, related to their intended concentration—also for full credit. They register for freshman classes before the term begins, assuring access to their preferred options.)

Achieving such an environment is not serendipitous. In a faculty meeting after that morning class, led by Bishundat, the

sources as public funding has attenuated; in May, for example, the school was awarded \$4.9 million from the Massachusetts Life Sciences Center, a private investment agency, to fund an initiative to study the microbiome. Philanthropy has also helped fund a new professorship in humanitarian studies; a Center for Health and Happiness; and a global cancer-prevention initiative; and has helped fund the school's transition from an Sc.D. program to a fully funded Ph.D., to attract and support the field's strongest students. Students still in the Sc.D. program typically don't receive living stipends or the same benefits as Ph.D. students: "The irony is that the transition highlighted very obvious inequities," Williams explained. With the Chan gift, "We did manage to close the gap—it's not completely closed, but we've worked with the Sc.D. students to provide tuition support and help cover the gap."

At last year's Commencement, Williams spoke about the philosophy of public health as a field that for the first time linked the categories of health and human rights. But in the twentieth century, Williams stressed, the field experienced transformational shifts in its philosophy and practice: "There are some not very appealing episodes in the history of public health in this country. There have been episodes of coercion used against minority populations: outside of reproductive health, we've had ugly episodes like the Tuskegee trials. Those are horrible cases whose ramifications are still felt in communities of color." And "in light of public health's especially troubling history concerning reproductive health," she added, it is "critically important...to recognize where the field stands *today*: for reproductive justice, which means every woman should have a right to the full array of repro-

Michelle A. Williams



ductive health services, including birth control, screening for reproductive disorders, and abortion rights.

"There has to be recognition, when community outreach is being done," she said, "that the history [of the field] is not ignored. Because of that history, public health needs to be attentive to the diversity of its workforce, needs to be attentive to the fact that the philosophy of public health is that it's a social movement that is designed to optimize maximum human potential at a population scale, that it is about honoring individual human rights."

—MARINA BOLOTNIKOVA



**Devita Bishundat
and Melissa "Missy" Foy**

teachers discussed reordering the readings to better promote students' writing gains. One happily reported that students had begun coming to office hours, another that the "crestfallen" response to a low grade on a paper had been succeeded by acceptance

("The standards are the standards at Georgetown," as a student put it) and moving on. In general, as Matt Pavesich put it, CSP students are "less polished" than other entering students, but they exhibit "greater willingness to take risks as writers" and learners—a trait the whole faculty team seconded.

Outside the classroom, academic support extends to organized study groups, seminars, and workshops on resources on and off campus (internships, research opportunities, and study abroad). CSP upperclassmen serve as mentors: some are residential advisers during the summer, like their FSJ counterparts at Yale. School-year attendance at advising sessions and academic workshops is mandated. Omaris Caceres, a sophomore from Clearwater, Florida, described the requirements as direction on acquiring "tools that really help me succeed": study skills, test-taking, going to office hours, net-

working, and budgeting.

Academic progress is paramount, but the confidence necessary to achieve it stems as well from an encompassing suite of co-curricular activities, most shaped by the students themselves. The myriad current programs range from email outreach from the program staff and socializing to student-led GS Proud events that embrace an identity as lower-socioeconomic-status members of a campus where much greater affluence prevails.

Meanwhile John Wright, assistant director of the counseling and psychiatric service, is available to consult directly with students, waiving wait times for appointments, meeting confidentially outside the counseling center, and serving as a "community psychologist" to discuss immediate issues or unaddressed family traumas that may hinder academic success. During the summer CSP program, he introduces these ideas in chats about "thriving in your first year." His school-year workshops address adjusting to a new community, returning home for the holidays, and coping with pre-exam and other stress. Given students' lim-

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"To Be True to Our Complicated History"

Harvard Law School (HLS)

recognizes its historical ties to slavery—its first professorship was endowed by Isaac Royall Jr., an eighteenth-century sugar plantation owner—with a memorial plaque at the center of the school's campus. harvardmag.com/hls-slavery-17

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ited prior access to such resources, or reluctance to use them (“We don’t talk about mental health in our communities,” one student said), Wright’s work is a core investment in what one dean called Georgetown’s “wraparound” care for them.

That commitment has spread. A provostial query turned up hundreds of faculty and staff members who were first-generation college-goers and allies. In late September, the day after a formal “induction ceremony” for first-gen students, the faculty and staff supporters donned T-shirts identifying themselves—making the first-gen campus community even more visible.

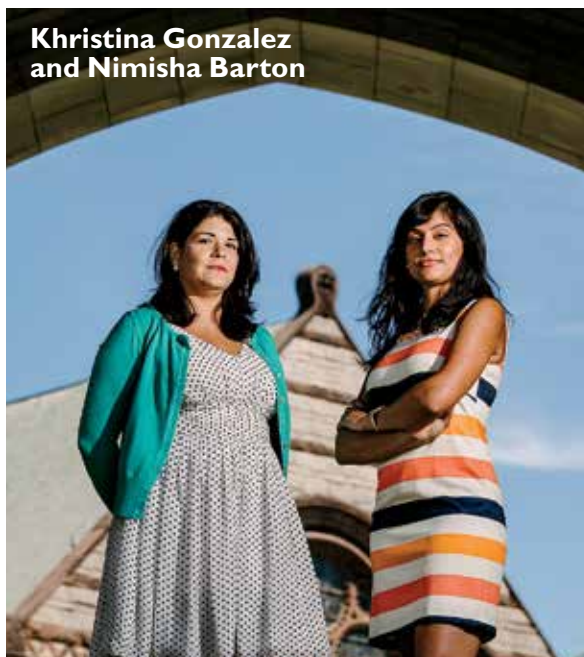
Such measures “empower students to see that roadblocks are not deficiencies,” as Foy put it. Students reported that Georgetown’s resources were their first, or only, channels for such guidance; they affectionately described Foy, Bishundat, and others in parental terms, and their student peers as family. Sophomore Hashwinder Singh, from Tacoma, putting his fingers together, said “My family and I were like this. I didn’t have anyone but my family.” Despite confidence in his academic skills, “I was so scared to come to Georgetown”—so the CSP community was a lifeline.

In that sense, said Dean McWade, CSP and GSP and PEP do exactly what Georgetown intends: they welcome cohorts whom the university wishes to educate, but who lack “cultural capital through no fault of their own.” At the same time, she said, first-gen and low-income outreach to the broader community helps “educate the faculty about who’s in front of them these days,” as the student body evolves. For Charles Deacon, who admitted them, the stakes go far beyond the pipeline from recruiting through enrollment; the outcome overall, he said, is “about first-generation students being successful.”

“I’m here to help you grow”

PRINCETON, OF LATE, has focused its energy and resources on an unequaled scale, bringing every element of programs for first-generation and low-income students’ success into an integrated whole, with

thoughtful preparation for their academic, co-curricular, and social lives on campus. Long perceived as elitist, it has moved aggressively to change the reality: from a minimal 7 percent of students eligible for Pell grants in the class of 2008 to 22 percent in the class of 2021 (likely leading the Ivies; the first-gen cohort has increased from 6 percent to 17 percent). It hosts the Leadership Enterprise for a Diverse America summer institute for promising low-income high-school juniors, and recruits heavily among them. A planned 500-student expansion could enlarge this cohort; among its aims is making “a concerted effort to identify



Khristina Gonzalez and Nimisha Barton

and attract more students from low-income families and ensure these students receive the support they need once they are on campus.” For the first time since 1990, it is also accepting transfer students for 2018—and explicitly encourages applications “from students from low-income backgrounds, community college students, and U.S. military veterans.”

Compared to its past profile, “Princeton is different,” said Khristina Gonzalez, associate dean of the college and director of programs for access and inclusion—but making admissions more accessible does not ensure “equity of access to the resources once you arrive.” Unlike legacies (and perhaps continuing-generation students generally), for whom “implicit knowledge, passed down generationally,” leads seamlessly to fellowships, research opportunities, study abroad, and so on, newcomers to

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Yesterday's News

From the pages of the *Harvard Alumni Bulletin* and *Harvard Magazine*

1927 “To vagabond,” i.e. “to rove around classrooms where one does not belong,” has entered the undergraduate vernacular. The *Bulletin* reports a noticeable increase in the practice during the fall, in part because *Crimson* editors have begun printing daily lists of lectures deemed to be of general interest.

1942 Thirty-nine members of the Harvard Auxiliary Fire Department, organized to supplement the regular Cambridge department in case of fire from enemy air attack, receive their badges at a special dinner with University officials and Cambridge firemen.

1947 The Band expresses student opinion on a suitable World War II memorial by spelling out “Harvard Needs a Student Activity Center” during half time at the Princeton game.

1952 Oliver Bolton '39 (R-Ohio) is elected to Congress, joining his mother, Frances Payne Bolton (re-elected for a seventh term), as the first mother-and-son representatives in U.S. history.

1957 Harvard Student Agencies Inc. has been chartered as a private non-profit Massachusetts corporation.

tion. HAS plans to work closely with Harvard financial-aid officers to assist needy students by encouraging and helping to organize student-conducted business enterprises.

1962 A bequest from bacteriologist and immunologist William A. Hinton '05, M.D. '12, Harvard's first black professor, has set up a Dwight D. Eisenhower Scholarship Fund for graduate students, to recognize that administration's accomplishments toward acceptance of the principle of equal opportunity for all.

1967 Meeting at Harvard, the National Association of Graduate School Deans unanimously proposes scrapping existing selective-service laws in favor of a lottery.

1992 Tommy's Lunch, “a Mount Auburn hangout for generations of Harvardians,” closes its doors on Thanksgiving weekend, without fanfare, after 35 years of feeding hungry undergraduates.

higher education have no roadmap to this “hidden curriculum.”

That was certainly so for the young Sonia Sotomayor. But a twenty-first-century Sotomayor might be welcomed by Gonzalez to the seven-week summer Freshman Scholars Institute (FSI). If not among the 80 students invited for FSI, she might participate in an online version, and then, once enrolled, join the Scholars Institute Fellows Program—also led by Gonzalez, with associate director Nimisha Barton. (SIFP is a four-year series of workshops, faculty mentorships, and other experiences that extend the FSI immersion and broaden it to all similar undergraduates throughout their Tiger years. Underscoring its interest in such students, Princeton's materials for applicants highlight first-gen students and faculty, and describe SIFP.)

Together, since 2015, drawing on their common experiences through their Ph.D. degrees and as Princeton writing teachers, Gonzalez and Barton have scaffolded opportunities that help all first-gen and low-income undergraduates adapt to their new surroundings, take responsibility for their education, train for leadership, and make the most of the university's resources. Alongside coursework, FSI has seeded extracurricular learning: students receive “Bingo Plus” cards on which they must check off attending sessions about the undergraduate research office, nutrition and wellness counseling, fellowships advising, the writing center, and many other resources.

FSI, like Georgetown's summer immersion, dates to the late 1960s, when Princeton began orientations for minority students prospectively interested in engineering. It now incorporates two courses: “Ways of Knowing” (WK), a sort of interdisciplinary analog to Harvard's freshman Expository Writing, with close writing and reading; and since 2015, one of three purpose-built quantitative or scientific offerings: a foundational engineering lab; a life-sciences research course; or a course in data, visualization, and quantitative methods. (Each confers full credit; students know the stakes, learn about college grading, and earn breathing room during subsequent se-

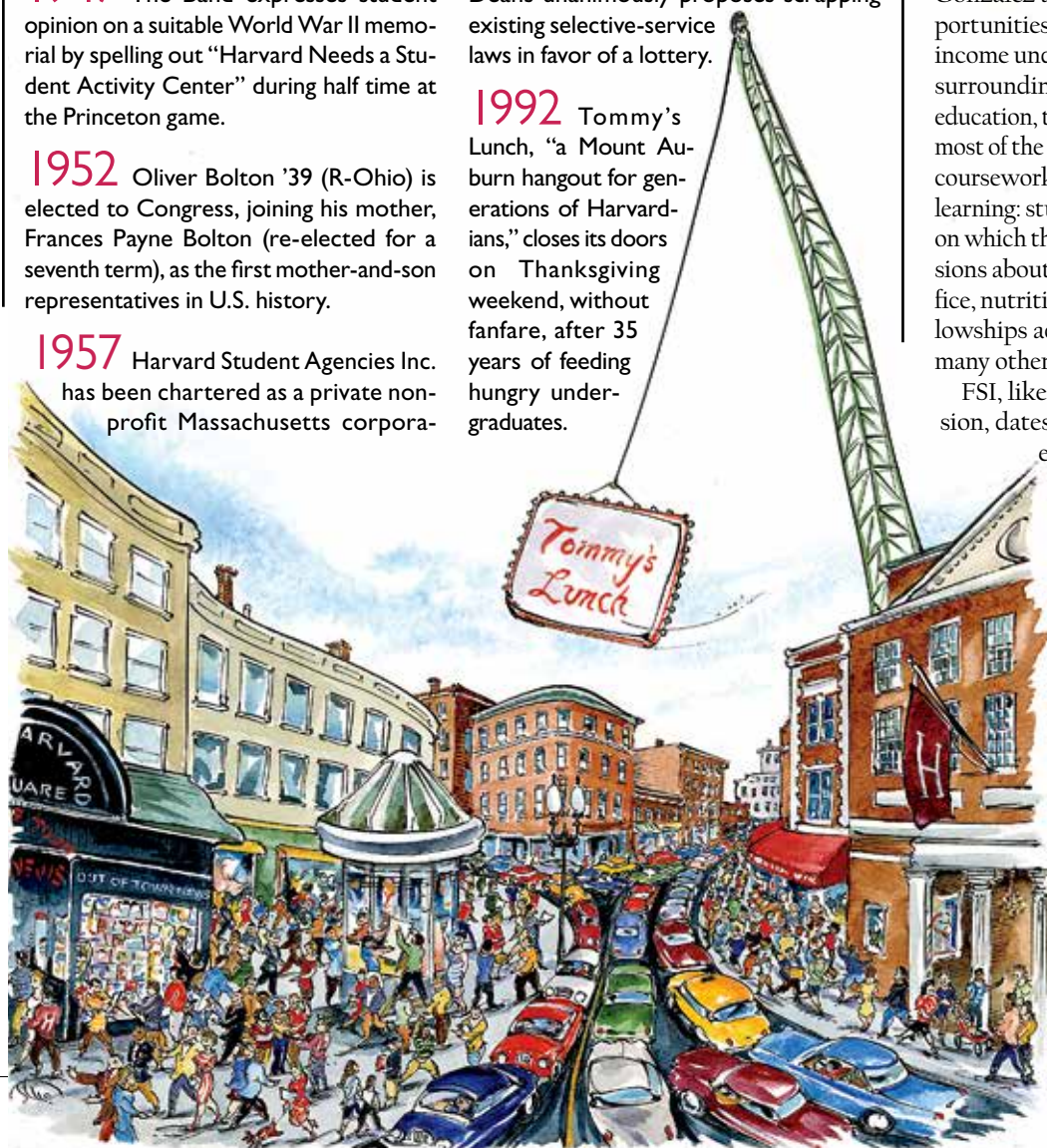


Illustration by Mark Steele

menters for extracurricular or further academic pursuits.)

The content and teaching are fully up to Princeton standards—and conducted in ways that support students' embrace of them. In this year's WK, students encountered everyone from Plato to Einstein. During one class, instructor Erin Raffety, a post-doctoral lecturer in the writing program, told a student anxious about drafting and revising a paper, "I encourage you to come in, talk about your progress" and ideas. "I'm here to help you grow. If you feel you're not, I want to know that." Addressing the difficult opening passage of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, she reminded them, "You guys are all sophisticated readers, so you can see how it's written."

During a break, a student from Seattle said the course helped him and his peers "wade into the water before we get taken by the undertow." Another said her FSI peers had in common not only lower socioeconomic status than their other imminent classmates, but also "what comes with that and why it happened. Maybe your family isn't perfect, maybe their household is dark-

A student said the course helped him and his peers "wade into the water before we get taken by the undertow."

er, not what you think an ideal childhood should be." Yet even facing new intellectual demands and a full FSI schedule, she said, "It's the most relaxed I've been in a while."

Once back to business, Raffety guided students toward their reading of diverse critics' approaches to Morrison's novel. Watch what "scholarly moves" they make, she counseled—drawing on the text, or using outside sources—so they could plan their own work as incipient Princeton scholars.

In the biology class, organized around a problem in serotonin signaling, Heather Thieringer circulated among benches where pairs of students in lab coats worked together, offering comments, but not lecturing. When one asked whether she should be adding something to her *C. elegans* (round-worm) sample, Thieringer answered neither "yes" nor "no," but as a scientist: "It

depends on your research plan." Besides offering many of the students their first lab experience, she said, she aimed to pilot a research-based approach for Princeton's introductory molecular-biology courses—one of many examples of applying FSI instruction to the college at large. (Her co-instructor, Geneva Stein, is assistant director, undergraduate learning, for the McGraw Center for Teaching & Learning; a direct connection to Princeton's home for enhancing pedagogy and the curriculum, and strengthening student study skills.)

In "Foundations of Engineering," Claire Gmachl, Higgins professor of electrical engineering, oversaw FSIs diligently designing and building bottle rockets. She, too, had an ulterior motive for teaching the course, for the third consecutive summer: to find ways to accelerate the progress of first-year students lacking AP math and physics into

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actual engineering. “I love teaching it,” she said, “because they’re not jaded yet, they’re so eager to learn.” (The students remain visibly young at heart: one had inscribed on the rocket fins, “To Infinity and Beyond”; another, in Tiger orange, “21”—the planned graduation year.) Perhaps united by their first-gen and low-income identities, groups of students who had completed their apparatus prepared for a test together—calling out variables, leafing through a text, pro-

tion in classroom teaching and pedagogical strategy within the McGraw Center. Their presence gives the FSI students immediate access to a multiyear cohort of Princeton undergraduates, many with backgrounds similar to their own, enabling informal connections and conversations.

The fellows also conduct academic-year workshops for students, coordinated by Barton, on myriad aspects of that “hidden curriculum” on campus (how to apply for

fellowships, participate in a section, write a research proposal, and master the intangibles, like speaking “prof-o-saurus” during casual conversation or office hours) and beyond (how to network, prepare a résumé, and manage finances). Volunteer faculty

members help them substantively, and often participate in the sessions.

Barton has outlined a four-year sequence of experiences that help students choose concentrations, prepare for thesis research, and identify and pursue postgraduate plans. The fellows gain confidence and leadership skills that have increasingly propelled them, Gonzalez reports, to positions of leadership across campus—an outcome strongly supported by her peers at Georgetown and Yale.

What might students learn from this welter of experiences? According to senior Jessica Reed, “You are forced to learn to ask for help, and you are forced to collaborate”—lessons about learning that might well apply to undergraduates everywhere.

HOW MIGHT HARVARD and other colleges best address the needs of the students they are admitting from under-resourced high schools and families constrained in means? Is a five-day pre-orientation meaningful? Do certain students need a multiweek bridge program? Are there needs extending throughout the undergraduate years?

Rachel Gable, now at Virginia Commonwealth University’s global education office, said her research in Cambridge and Washington, D.C., persuaded her that different in-

stitutions could pursue distinct approaches suited to their cultures. Georgetown’s centralized programming reflects both its Jesuit tradition of service and what she called a “multicultural” theme, extending back a half-century: a recognition that groups of people differ, and are best served by devising programs tailored to their needs. Harvard has what she called a “liberal” approach, in the classical meaning of the word: each individual is to be treated as an individual. Thus, its preference for what she termed “capillary” programs and resources, such as enhanced peer advising and training for academic advisers who are available to all students, in the expectation that each will benefit in personally suitable ways.

Evangelists for substantial, centralized programs—Foy at Georgetown, Princeton’s Gonzalez—argue that their efforts focused on cohorts of first-generation and low-income students will, over time, spread across their communities, changing their cultures. Whether the programs are “capillary” or narrower in focus, faculty members agree that virtually *all* students today could benefit from efforts to highlight the co-curricular and soft skills that contribute to every student’s academic performance, and impel improvements in teaching. To the extent that these initiatives derive from admitting more economically diverse students and assuring that they can thrive once on campus, they of course promote more inclusive interactions among undergraduates whose life circumstances vary more widely than ever before. So far, no campus appears the worse for trying.

—JOHN S. ROSENBERG

“Disappointing” Endowment Returns—and a Protracted Restructuring

ON SEPTEMBER 19, Harvard Management Company (HMC) CEO N.V. Narvekar reported an 8.1 percent investment return on endowment assets during fiscal year 2017, ended last June 30, observing bluntly, “Our performance is disappointing and not where it needs to be.” Although the positive return (after investment expenses) reverses the prior-year *negative* 2.0 percent return, HMC’s gains substantially trailed peers’ reported results. Taking into account the



COURTESY OF HARVARD COLLEGE FIRST GENERATION STUDENT UNION

Members of Harvard’s First Generation Student Union advocate a summer bridge or pre-orientation preparation.

gressing through a tricky formula—with none of the ethnic self-segregation that sometimes arises in other campus settings.

There is early evidence that all this careful work pays off. Gonzalez cited a post-FSI survey indicating a 26-percentage-point gain in students’ confidence in asking questions in class, a 34-point gain in talking to a professor, and more than doubling in confidence in their ability to write course papers. Overall, students reported a 31-percentage-point gain in confidence in their ability to have an academically successful freshman year.

Plenty of upperclass peers reinforce that growing optimism. As at Yale and Georgetown, they serve as residential advisers during the summer. At Princeton, they may also be summer “course fellows,” running sections and mentoring students. Those fellows are not only “approachable near-peers,” as Keith Shaw, director of transfer programs, put it, but also trained educators: FSI alumni and others who choose to become “institute fellows” through the SIPF program benefit from regular, structured instruc-