

Admissions, through the Ages

Eight years out of Yale—after stints as a U.S. Marine platoon leader and a teacher—Dwight D. Miller joined the Harvard College admissions office in July 1967. That was before the merger with Radcliffe; before the Supreme Court first ruled on affirmative action in admissions, in *Regents of University of California v. Bakke* (1978—and again in *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 2003; the multiple rounds of *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin*, decided in 2016; and the current Students for Fair Admissions litigation against Harvard, possibly also headed to Washington on appeal); and before the global frenzy to gain a place at the nation's selective colleges led to a tsunami of applications, plummeting admissions rates—and, in turn, a parental/high-schooler arms race to gain an edge through private counselors, test-prep courses, and ever-more applications filed by each anxious student.

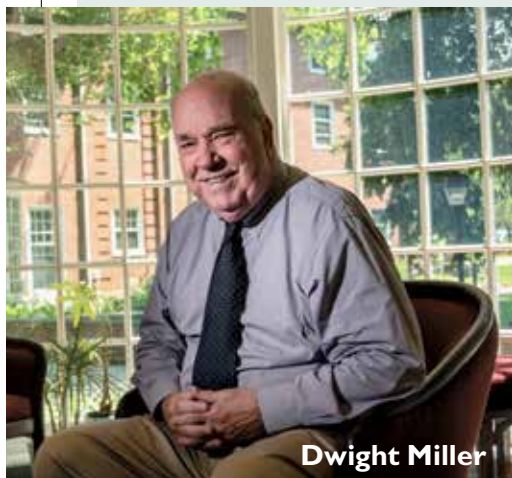
At Harvard, where navigating thro' this change and storm has meant attracting

Early on, he divided his time between admissions and service as senior advisor in the freshman dean's office—and he was a proctor in the Yard from 1967 to 1990, the longest tenure known. Those engagements gave him deeper insight into the College experience and how applicants might get the most from, and contribute the most to, the place. Increasingly, those admitted have represented a far wider range of minority and ethnic backgrounds, and of socioeconomic circumstances.

On the downside, today's applicants are “certainly much more uptight about the process,” Miller said, citing “the pressure on them to get into college A, B, or C—especially from the parents.” Withal, the experience accumulated within the admissions staff across the decades has enabled Harvard to winnow the applicants to find the “offbeat” ones who can thrive here, and contribute to the community in special ways. And he is grateful that “the sense of entitlement” that prevailed at mid century, when the applicants were so heavily weighted toward eastern prep schools, has dwindled away.

As he worked with alumni volunteers who interview applicants and support their education through philanthropy devoted to financial aid, Miller set out in the 1980s to gain formal recognition for their efforts. The resulting Hiram Hunn Award, created in 1986, honors the schools-and-scholarships foot soldiers; the eponymous Hunn, A.B. 1921, who did such work for 60 years in Iowa and Vermont (where he and Miller intersected for a decade and a half); and Miller himself, for his advocacy on their behalf. He was also recognized, directly, by the James '72 and Rita Cain Scholarship fund, established by a former student in Grays Hall when he was proctor; it will be renamed upon Miller's retirement.

That moment, amazingly, is now at hand, effective September 1. His Harvard admissions service extended nearly as long as Hunn's, and accounts for more than a half-century of College classes, numbering thousands of undergraduates. No matter what changes in admissions unfold in the next five decades, no one in sight is likely to equal Miller's record. —JOHN S. ROSENBERG



Dwight Miller

and reviewing an applicant pool that increased from fewer than 5,000 annually when Miller appeared on the scene to 43,330 hopefuls for the class of 2023, experience and perspective have been especially valuable. No one has personified that better than Miller, who served under admissions deans Chase N. Peterson, L. Fred Jewett, and William R. Fitzsimmons.

Now senior admissions officer, Miller, Ed.M. '71, has covered most of New England; the Atlantic seaboard; a chunk of the Midwest; four southwestern states; for a quarter-century, Long Island; and Canada.

we used something that had those properties as an airplane-engine insulation....' You don't see that at companies because they're usually focused on their [specific] expertise," he pointed out, "and you don't ever see that in academia." In turn, engineers and researchers are supported, as ideas evolve, by a half-dozen staff members of Harvard's Office of Technology Development, who can accelerate commercial application in the most effective way (see "Accelerating Innovation," March-April, page 18).

Overall, said Ingber, the institute's approach might be called self-assembling interdisciplinary research. Instead of erecting buildings and placing experts from different disciplines who have "no reason to work together" in proximity to one another, he explained, "You identify problems that are so exciting, and so difficult, and you get the best people who want to solve them, but who can't do it on their own. And then, when you bring other scientists and engineers that have the right expertise to complement them nearby, you just get out of their way, and it happens." Because faculty members commonly operate like "independent entrepreneurs, who have their own cultures," he continued, "we created a new culture: we let our faculty keep their own labs," but move some portion of it—generally their most entrepreneurial postdoctoral fellows, research assistants, and graduate students—to the Wyss.

"When you see the research that has been done in the first five years," said Wyss, speaking from Paris and reflecting on his 2013 decision to double his initial support, "the intellectual property, the papers published in top scientific magazines,...the influence it had on teaching at Harvard, the influence it had on collaborative research throughout [the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences] and the Faculty of Arts and Sciences—you have to continue."

Having recently looked at some great paintings, he added, "When Cezanne created one of his landscapes, he had to go and paint another one. He could not stop. So, when you create the Wyss and then think about the second gift, you almost have to do it." Now he has done so again, assuring the institute's momentum and further anchoring Harvard's expanding dexterity in making fundamental life-sciences and biomedical discoveries, and translating them to the real world of application to human needs.

For a full report, see harvardmag.com/wyss-gift3-19. —JONATHAN SHAW