HOMESCHOOLING

Professor Elizabeth Bartholet believes homeschooling should be presumptively banned (“The Risks of Homeschooling,” May-June, page 10). By every metric, she would have outlawed my family. My dad was a high-school dropout. My mom attended a best-selling book before college. My parents never missed an opportunity for instruction. They wanted their children to love learning, and there was never a shortage of opportunities beyond our formal curriculum. We spent endless hours exploring the woods around our house—or inside reading books. In high school my homeschooled friends and I put on plays, entered music competitions, and traveled the country for debate tournaments. My twin brother and I started a youth-targeted nonprofit, hosting conferences and publishing a best-selling book before college.

And yet my childhood was wonderful. Education was woven into everything we did. My parents never missed an opportunity for instruction. They wanted their children to love learning, and there was never a shortage of opportunities beyond our formal curriculum. We spent endless hours exploring the woods around our house—or inside reading books. In high school my homeschooled friends and I put on plays, entered music competitions, and traveled the country for debate tournaments. My twin brother and I started a youth-targeted nonprofit, hosting conferences and publishing a best-selling book before college.

A Note to Readers

We hope that you are safe and well—and that by the time this issue is posted online and reaches your mailbox, humanity will have made significant progress in reducing the baleful effects of the coronavirus (due in part to the contributions of Harvard scientists; see page 18).

Three things to note about the July-August Harvard Magazine. First, and unsurprisingly, “The Risks of Homeschooling” (May-June, page 10) attracted many comments, mostly critical. We publish a sample in the letters columns. Many were much longer than the article itself; we could not nearly print them all and accommodate diverse perspectives, so we refer you to the online issue to sample more, at length.

Second, some of our contents are constrained by the pandemic. For instance, coverage of the tercentenary of Massachusetts Hall, and what it has come to mean to the community (page 14), was conceived as a feature, accompanied by some of the marvelous letters, official records, drawings, and artifacts in the University Archives, graciously rounded up by Ross Mulcare, archivist for outreach, research, instruction, and special projects; graduate assistant Natalie Malter; and colleagues. Having whetted our appetites, they and we were disappointed that the campus closure derailed plans to scan these materials to share with you. When conditions permit, we will work with these superb professionals to present a portfolio online, and in a future issue will share directions on how to access it.

Third, this issue is thinner than we would like. Commencement—always a significant part of July-August coverage—was reduced to a virtual degree-conferring ceremony this year (page 16). But economics played a role, too: in the devastating economic wake of COVID-19, our advertising partners are managing their expenses with special care.

We in turn are being careful to husband the magazine’s resources (as the University must manage its budget: page 21), the better to serve you in the long run. Please enjoy this issue, and follow the extensive, continuing coverage of essential Harvard news at www.harvardmagazine.com.

~John S. Rosenberg, Editor

Cambridge 02138

Health care, St. Louis, pioneering astronomer
Lessons Learned?

What has the University discovered about itself from its exposure to the coronavirus? It may seem premature to speculate just a few months after the campus community largely dispersed. Yet there are apparent contradictions, important to sort out, between focusing on Harvard’s needs versus emphasizing cooperation with peer institutions as higher education faces frightening challenges.

- Respect the past: In late 2008, when recession ravaged the endowment and other financial decisions soured, the University faced a liquidity crisis, and borrowed $2.5 billion, at high interest, to pay its bills. Those unforeseen risks in financial management and shortcomings in oversight prompted governance reforms, unveiled in late 2010, meant to enhance performance of the Corporation’s fiduciary responsibilities.

- When the current economic calamity unfolded, the University had ample liquid funds on hand (see harvardmag.com/virus-fiscal-hit-20). In fact, Harvard had bolstered its cash position last fall, anticipating a recession (not this one), and maintained multiple backup sources for further liquidity if needed. The lessons have been learned: in this regard, the governance reforms and changes in financial administration worked.

- Act fast: As President Lawrence S. Bacow has explained (harvardmag.com/bacow-on-pandemic-20), once faculty experts made the pandemic’s risks clear, he and other University leaders immediately prepared to shift to remote teaching and empty the campus to safeguard community health.

Bacow may also move swiftly to make the near-term financial adjustments Harvard faces in light of a diminished endowment (distributions from which are the largest source of operating revenues); lost income from extension and continuing education; deferred research; and the costs of the steps needed to resume residential classes and research. As Tufts president, he outlined the impact of the 2008 financial crisis that October and November—and balanced the budget within the fiscal year (‘‘The Pragmatist,’’ September–October 2008, page 32). Tufts, admittedly, was and is significantly less endowment-dependent than Harvard. The University’s immediate budgetary blues are consequential (see page 21), but some are temporary concerns. Team Bacow seems inclined to have deans take their medicine now, and look toward the future sooner. The reduced endowment distribution and new assessment announced in early June are a downpayment (see harvardmag.com/covid-onlineschools-distributiondown-20). Furloughs and layoffs are likely next.

These steps suggest how 2020 differs from 2008. Both affected Harvard’s finances, but the educational impact of social distancing from a residential university is potentially transformative. All the more reason to begin dealing with what lies ahead.

- Identifying opportunities. Preparedness means being able to seize opportunities. Harvard’s recession planning spoke of identifying ‘‘areas for investment and growth. Creating capacity…in advance of a downturn can enable the organization to…’’play offense’’ during times of constraint. The ability to hire faculty or invest in emerging fields of study can better position Harvard for future success’’—especially if other institutions are hamstringed. Bacow, a runner, said ‘‘races are won on the uphill,’’ when others are winded.

One concern is that the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS), in particular, hasn’t been able to do anything like that. In the past dozen or so years, it has invested heavily in financial aid and fixing up the undergraduate Houses—important priorities, to be sure. But its faculty census has remained unchanged. The disciplinary mix has shifted toward engineering and applied sciences, and there are plenty of new faces. But more scholars in more new fields in which to do Harvard-quality research would be even better. So it was discouraging to read in Dean Claudine Gay’s April 15 message that almost all current faculty searches had been suspended, and ‘‘new searches will not be authorized.’’

After 9/11, the Great Recession, and now the pandemic, the Corporation’s highest fiduciary responsibility may well be to guard against catastrophes every decade: rein in spending (as in the past few years), and fighting to maintain at least the Harvard that exists today. But that is a worrisome definition of ‘‘playing offense’’—for a world desperate for new ideas and breakthroughs, and for an institution designed to foster them.

- Going big. Given those caveats, it may seem obtuse to suggest that Harvard aim larger. But the 2010 governance reforms had two aims: to enhance the Corporation’s fiduciary oversight and to create space for strategic thinking. The need for the latter (especially when immediate concerns loom so large) is greater than ever—perhaps beyond any one institution acting alone.

As noted, even in a benign economic decade, FAS had trouble expanding. Bacow, while fully attentive to Harvard, has also been generous in talking about all of higher education. He champions partnerships with peers like MIT and Boston University on matters ranging from faculty or graduate student housing to quantum-science research. And he constantly emphasizes the importance of the local biomedical/biotechnology ecosystem of universities, hospitals, research institutes, and private enterprises—productive collaborators in attacking COVID-19.

With many schools’ return to residential teaching and research delayed, Harvard will feel the pain—but large public and smaller private schools may be crippled. If foreign students cannot enroll, the challenges multiply. This applies across higher education, at a time when its services are essential.

So perhaps now the highest priority for Harvard is not playing offense, but extending the notion of partnership to like institutions in Greater Boston—beyond single-purpose entities such as the Broad Institute (the Harvard-MIT genomics-research shop). All nearby universities will struggle to fulfill their core missions: hiring faculty; maintaining laboratories and libraries; investing in remote and online learning; and strangling to advance as they refit for a new era of constraint. The core mission will be squeezed across the board.

From its hard-won position of relative financial strength and continuing academic prowess, the University is uniquely placed to be a foresighted academic partner and collaborator: advancing Boston not just as a biotech center, but as a higher-education mecca. (One thinks of the collaboration among the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and nearby colleges.) If Harvard were to encourage such a research-university-level cluster, it might usefully inspire similar clusters elsewhere.

The University has survived a sometimes-punishing start to this millennium. Today, much of higher education may not. To continue to survive, and to create that ‘‘capacity’’ to thrive on society’s behalf, might mean moving beyond any one institution to win ‘‘on the uphill.’’ During the past decade, Harvard improved its governance and financial management to good effect. Now it has been presented with an opportunity—even an imperative—to see if it can perform at an equally high level strategically, to advance teaching and discovery as a whole, in a fraught era. —John S. Rosenberg, Editor
sequences of being isolated as a child. At 41, there are still some issues I struggle with, but I am conquering these with the help of therapy and a supportive partner.

I hope that Bartholet’s work will help children grow up to be happy and healthy adults, who can make positive contributions to the world.

P.Z. West Hollywood, Calif.

Bartholet’s views are a smear of all homeschoolers with derogatory references to “child abuse,” “authoritarian control” by parents, and to “some” of them who “question science” (isn’t science all about questioning?) and “promote female subservience and white supremacy”—stereotyping that thoughtful people avoid.

She wants homeschoolers banned or made to provide an education “equivalent to that required in public schools,” to impose conformity to government standards on a tiny movement with only 3 or 4 percent of all U.S. school-age children. We cannot tolerate this tiny amount of diversity!

Public school is all about uniformity: children segregated into strict age-groups, teacher-student ratios that stop most personal contact, standardized textbooks and tests for each grade level, readings authored by no-names for specific levels of English comprehension, all putting U.S. literacy scores at around average, with many countries doing better (National Center for Education Statistics). There’s no stretching of brains, such as when our three-and-a-half-year-old granddaughter listened raptly to a classic folk tale we read to her (via Zoom) with half the language above her “level.”

For 10 years, we homesteaded in rural Maine and ran a small private elementary school for our three sons and a few others. Among many things, we read children’s classics aloud to all, had them draw pictures to their sentences, and wrote one-act musical comedies with a good role for each student, rehearsing them meticulously and having them perform publicly. With this very unpublic-school education, our three sons went to Harvard and MIT.

Lenore Monello Schloming ’59
Skip Schloming, Ph.D.
Cambridge

We don’t typically think of Harvard Magazine as promoting racial and religious stereotypes, so the illustration for the article shocked and saddened us. As a homeschool graduate and teacher respectively, we know it is untrue to caricature us as Caucasian Bible-bashers who imprison children inside. The National Center for Education Statistics, an agency affiliated with the U.S. Department of Education, found in a September 2019 survey that the two primary reasons Americans chose to homeschool were not directly related to any faith commitments. Counter to the ominous suggestions of the Bible figured in your cartoon, parents chose to homeschool their children because of concerns that the local-school environment did not suit their children and because of the quality of academics. In 2017, 40 percent of American homeschoolers did not identify as white.

As for being imprisoned inside, this is a patent misrepresentation. Benjamin and his brother Jonathan spent the great majority of their homeschool lives in the fresh air, whether doing homework or class outside, or at a variety of meaningful jobs and volunteering posts. Massachusetts’s enlightened homeschool code even allows students to be anywhere in the world during the school year—starting in tenth grade, Benjamin spent four weeks each academic year in China, living with a family and studying Mandarin, freeing up the summer for other pursuits.

This is a lifestyle seen by “schoolschooled” young people as remarkably free and empowering. We cannot count the number of times we have been told by such students that they would infinitely rather choose an educational option offering unrestricted freedom of movement; remarkable agency in pursuing customized learning goals and developing skills to high levels; and the respect and dignity due a unique individual with unique hopes, aspirations, and dreams. The homeschoolers we know look like the joyful children running around outside the house: excited to engage with their peers and the world around them, and committed to making a positive difference. To portray them as prisoners—in a house made of books no less—is a tragically ludicrous perversion of reality.

Benjamin Porteous ’22
Dr. Rebecca Porteous ’87
Arlington, Mass.

The article does great disservice to the subject it is treating and to balanced and sober inquiry.

A picture opens the article with kids playing gleefully outside, while a homeschool girl sits sullen and lonely as she looks out from behind a barred window. The reality is any bars are on the windows and round the perimeters of our public schools, behind which walls children sit for several hours a day.

There is no serious probe to any shortcomings of public education that it should experience an increasing exodus. [Bartholet] merely paints the 90 percent who have left as a Ruby Ridge fundamentalist breeding ground of anti-science, misogyny, and white supremacy.

It is asserted that homeschooling not only violates children’s “right to be protected from potential child abuse, but may keep them from contributing positively to a democratic society.” Regarding the former, one need only think of the viral videos of school fights and bullying on the bus, not to mention mass shootings. As to their being kept “from contributing positively to a democratic society,” simply look up how many U.S. presidents were home schooled.

We go on to read that “requiring children to attend schools outside the home for six or seven hours a day...does not un-
duly limit parents’ influence on a child’s views and ideas.” This cannot blithely be reduced to giving up a bit of time. This is a question of conceding the whole of their formal education.

Finally, public education is touted as being of higher quality and breadth in scope. Justify this against drop-out rates and rampant core-subject illiteracy. In turn, examine the homeschool record of academic excellence.

The arguments are spun quite nearly out of whole, monochromatic cloth.

David Brooks
Charlotte, N.C.

As a harvard grad and a mother who homeschooled my four children for portions of their K-12 years, I found Bartholet’s beliefs about the dangers of homeschooling to be alarming. Our system of rights is based on natural law, which exists apart from the modern state. The primary job of the latter is to safeguard our rights, including that of parents to raise their children as they see fit. Yet Bartholet seems to view parents’ decision to homeschool as suspect, even rebellious! The tail now wags the dog.

The state is supposedly answerable to the people. However, with respect to compulsory education, parental rights have withered in favor of the bureaucratic stranglehold teachers unions now have over basic curricula and the social engineering masquerading as lessons in democracy that is increasingly the goal of the public-school system. From my experience of sending my children to public school, intellectual curiosity dies on the altar of mind-numbing assembly lines of busywork. There are good teachers, but I believe the system and methodology are counter-productive. While exposure to many viewpoints occurs, usually without sufficient critique, the only viewpoints not tolerated are traditional ones. There are legitimate reasons why Christians, and other independent thinkers, homeschool. Their efforts should be applauded.

The real danger to democracy is the current system, with its push to mold students in the monolithic image of elites, our self-appointed philosopher-kings. Yet Bartholet ascribes to the government the mission of protecting “powerless” children from their “powerful” parents, ignoring the overweening power that the state and teachers unions exercise over both. To preserve freedom of thought and crit-

(please turn to page 63)
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letters

(continued from page 7)

ical thinking, both crucial building blocks of democracy, alternative school options, including homeschooling, must be encouraged.

Two big thumbs down to Bartholet’s ban!

SHEILA GREEN ’85

Oakdale, Calif.

healthcare costs


Why do shared savings programs barely reduce costs? Controlling diabetes is a universal element of these programs, but prevents complications 10 to 20 years in the future. These programs share savings when a population achieves collective clinical metric thresholds under care by numerous professionals. This muddies the incentives for individuals.

I have never seen data that pegs these thresholds to better health in the population. Rather, the metrics are really financial goals for the insurer, masquerading as clinical achievements.

Furthermore, good diabetic management requires using a growing number of ever more expensive medications. Better long-term clinical outcomes come at a short-term cost, and perhaps marginal if any short-term savings. Shared savings programs won’t connect a leg not amputated in 2035 to decisions made in 2020...assuming the patient even has the same insurer.

I further invite Cutler’s comments regarding the social determinants of health (SDOH). Studies attribute 20 percent of health to health care, 20 percent to genetics, and 60 percent to the quality of housing and education, transportation, food security, utilities, access to care and exposure to violence.

Rush University has incorporated a SDOH screening tool in its electronic medical record. Busy health-care professionals maintain SDOH is a societal issue outside their purview, so Rush and others have established partnerships with government agencies and community nonprofits to address SDOH.

Rush has seen decreased Medicare readmissions and bed-day utilization among Medicare high utilizers. Health care costs depend on far more than health care alone.

Cutler correctly says that reducing American health care costs requires a coordinated,
whole-system approach. “Fixing” health care will help, but as a society we must align incentives and effectively address all factors that affect our health.

Donald R. Lurye ’75, M.D., M.M.M., M.B.A. ’80  
Past president and board chair  
Illinois Academy of Family Physicians  
CEO (ret.), Elmhurst Clinic, LLC  
Elmhurst, Ill.

**H A V I N G S P E N T** almost 20 years in senior governance positions in a large, integrated not-for-profit healthcare system, I can affirm the opportunities David Cutler cites for cost reduction: administration, greed and gouging, and [being] in love with medical services. To those I would add efficiency, both in delivery and in operations.

But there is another facet to the high cost of health care: intensive lobbying by hospitals and the American Hospital Association, doctor groups, and the American Medical Association, and of, course, insurance and pharmaceutical companies. Whether it is in the hundreds of millions, or billions, of dollars, it has been, and is, relentless and aimed at the entire political spectrum. The purpose of this lobbying is, plain and simple, to protect the income and profits of its clients.

During my time in health-care governance, I heard a physician state at a conference, “American health care is the biggest cottage industry in the world.” Despite consolidations among hospitals and doctor groups, our health care is still highly fragmented. State regulation of insurance companies doesn’t help, either. While Obamacare made progress in covering the uninsured, there is a long way to go for universal coverage.

The paths to healthcare reform, both in cost reduction and toward universal coverage, are strewn with many roadblocks, both political and financial. My fear is that in trying to rectify these problems we as a country will try to fix everything at once. A step-by-step approach is more likely to meet less resistance and to gain acceptance as we go along. Let us hope.

Anthony C. Leonard ’59, M.B.A. ’66  
Guilford, Conn.

**S T . L O U I S , R E I N T E R P R E T E D**

Thanks to Marina Bolotnikova for her article on Walter Johnson’s book about St. Louis (“From Lewis and Clark to Michael Brown,” May-June, page 33). My wife and I worked, and raised a son and daughter there from 1947 to 1966. I remember all too clearly how uncomfortable it was, as a white math teacher at a classy white prep school, to lead white students through a crowd of extremely well-dressed, very polite black men and women, quietly protesting the St. Louis “custom” of restricting blacks to the upper balcony for orchestral or opera performances.

From 1949 to 1953, we lived in the suburb of Webster Groves, where a beautiful swimming pool had just been finished. It was funded by white and black taxpayers. But white taxpayers said their kids were not going to swim in a pool with black kids, even though the law said they could and should. The town fathers caved in and decided, despite summer temperatures close to a humid 100 degrees, to shut down the pool. In desperation I wrote a letter to the St. Louis Post-Dispatch lamenting the damages of such a bad decision. Wow! The hate mail started to fill my mailbox. “You must be a n*****,” one writer said, “or a mulatto, which was even worse!” That led to an invitation for me to speak at a meeting of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks. As I again made my plea, several angry members of the group stormed out.

Meet me in St. Louis? Lemme think it over.

Dawes Potter, A.M. ’47  
New York City

**T H A N K Y O U** for the article. I have mailed it to friends and ordered a copy of Walter Johnson’s important book.

My Harvard class held a mini-reunion in St. Louis a few years ago. We were.wined and dined and told the great history of the city. Nothing was said about St. Louis’s racist legacy. It was a wasted opportunity.

The Reverend Fred Fenton ’58  
Seal Beach, Calif.

**W H A T C O U N T S**

The excellent opinion piece, “What Counts” (May-June, page 5), makes clear the limitations of faculty governance in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. Many if not most other universities, like Stanford, where I now teach, have a faculty senate or council that includes elected representatives from each school. At Stanford, the Faculty Senate has worked well since 1968 to consider and vote on substantive policy issues, and operates collaboratively with the university administration. There is no way an entire FAS faculty of well over 800 members could operate so effectively. It seems past time for FAS, if not Harvard, to consider a similar body.

Thomas Ehrlich ’56, LL.B. ’59  
Palo Alto

“What counts” brought to mind an observation I read in Harvard Magazine years ago and have never quite forgotten: a statement by the late Professor Samuel Beer (whose SoC Sci 2 class was a highlight of my freshman year).

My memory may not be 100 percent correct, but his words went pretty much like this: “The Harvard faculty, as with any legislative body unfettered by party discipline, can always be counted on to muster a majority against any meaningful proposition.”

Perhaps you can imagine the multitude of times I remembered this wisdom—pertinent way beyond Harvard—while sitting (suffering) through faculty meetings at the university at which I served for many years.

Ken Manaster ’65, LL.B. ’66  
Professor of law, emeritus  
School of Law, Santa Clara University  
Santa Clara, Calif.

**B R E A K T H R O U G H A S T R O N O M E R**

Donovan Moore writes, about Cecilia Payne-Gaposchkin (Vita, May-June, page 38), “By looking down through a jeweler’s loupe, Payne was able to do what centuries of astronomers had tried to do by looking up through telescopes: determine what stars are made of.” But he oversimplifies here (and in the prologue of his recent biography) to the point of incorrectness, since the breakthrough by “Mrs. G.” (as we called her) was in applying recent theory on how those spectral lines on the photographic plates were formed to her own measurements, not merely by looking at the plates themselves.

It took some observational work by another young researcher, Donald Menzel, and theoretical work by Henry Norris Russell to overturn long-held beliefs that the stars’ elemental abundances were similar to Earth’s. Russell’s hesitancy on CPG’s 1925 conclusion that hydrogen dominates the stars, and later assumption of credit, would probably have been the same for a male graduate student’s thesis. When Menzel became director of the Harvard Observatory in the 1950s, he promptly arranged for Payne-Gaposchkin to be promoted to professor and doubled her salary.

Jay M. Pasachoff ’63, Ph.D. ’69  
Field Memorial Professor of astronomy  
Williams College

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