

As alumni, faculty, and affiliates of Harvard, we maintain an avid interest in the strength of Harvard's undergraduate curriculum. One of Harvard College's greatest strengths, in our view, has been its open-minded, curiosity-promoting liberal arts model, grounded in constant encouragement for students to explore, develop, and discover their intellectual and occupational interests. For students from wide-ranging educational backgrounds such as ours—from lower-income US public schools to schools in more exam-driven countries with less access to the liberal arts—a Harvard education can offer a breath of fresh air from the standardized coursework that some of us were used to.

This is why we are deeply concerned by Harvard's move from course "shopping week" to "course preview period" and [now to a model](#) where students must register for all courses as early as April and are expected to remain in those courses. The liberal arts model's interweaving of disciplines and ideas functions best when students are encouraged to explore interesting topics freely and make connections between different fields on their own. We believe that too many of that model's benefits will be lost under the new system.

Students today face daunting career pressures and high stakes for maintaining high grades, discouraging students from taking risks with classes. Exploring an unknown field, with an unusual topic and an unfamiliar professor, can be especially daunting for students whose family, immigration, or financial circumstances force them to plan carefully for post-grad careers. If you deter students from visiting lectures and impose administrative burdens on changing courses during the first week, the risks of trying something new become far greater.

We benefited greatly from opportunities for students to freely select courses and believe that the Harvard education we experienced would have been weaker and less intellectually rich without a free, flexible, and open course registration period. Course shopping helped those of us who were Harvard undergraduates enter areas like law, art history, plant biology, neuroscience, developmental economics, quantum field theory, and Japanese religion, letting us discover life-altering interests that we as 18-year-olds would never have imagined. Course shopping gave us or our students a chance to connect diverse disciplines in ways all too rare around the world, and helped make us open to questions and topics that, no matter how advanced our stage in education, we might otherwise not have known to appreciate.

The chance for many of us as students to better evaluate our needs and discover unexpected interests before deciding on courses made us more inquisitive in classes, and more engaging and motivating for our mentors and classmates. Thinking of Harvard's class of 2025 and future classes, we worry about what may become of the intellectual excitement of Harvard courses if the faculty upholds barriers that prevent students from exploring intellectually and discovering their interests.

For those of us serving as Teaching Fellows, the harmful effects of eliminating shopping week are clear. Students will have to decide on a course before they can see what it is like. For example, a student may shy away from a course with a heavy-looking workload, never seeing how skilled lecturers and TFs can make difficult subject matter fun and approachable. With

shopping week, we could often witness the benefits of having a roster full of students who made well-informed decisions to enroll. Sadly, opportunities to see instructors in action, which give students better insights and reassurance about a class, have been discouraged by the latest registration policies. Instead, students' enrollment decisions will likely be increasingly shaped by the rumors and imperfect ratings of the Q, or eventually of external sites like RateMyProfessors.

We understand that many aspects of university life had to change during the pandemic. It would be bizarre to suppose that course shopping—likely the single most Zoom-appropriate of all of Harvard's traditions—should for public health reasons be [one of the first victims of the pandemic](#). We hope that Harvard College will quickly return to and maintain a highly flexible, open, intellectually dynamic course enrollment system, a key and underappreciated foundation that made Harvard's liberal arts model thrive.

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Naomi Berhane (Biomedical Engineering, '20)

Cengiz Cemaloğlu (Anthropology and Government, '18)

Jiafeng Chen (Applied Mathematics, '19)

Sasinat Chindapol (Environmental Science and Public Policy, '19)

Lulu Chua-Rubinfeld (History, '18, J.D. '22)

Sal DeFrancesco (Social Studies, '19)

Erica Eisen (History of Art and Architecture, '16)

Jade Freeze (Chemistry and Physics, '19)

Howard Georgi (Chemistry and Physics, '68), *professor of Physics and former faculty dean of Leverett House*

Rachel Gologorsky (Computer Science and Mathematics, '19)

Samarth Gupta (Economics, '18)

Archie Hall (Social Studies, '20)

James Hankins (honorary degree, AM '92), *professor of History*

Rebecca Jarvis (Linguistics and Mathematics, '19)

Gurbani Kaur (Human Developmental and Regenerative Biology, '17)

Max Kuhelj Bugarič (Government, '19)

Anisa Kureishi (Philosophy and Physics, '19)

Ju Hyun Lee (Chemistry, '18)

Jessica Levy (Social Studies and Philosophy, '18)

Harry Lewis (Applied Mathematics, '68, PhD '74), *professor of Computer Science*

Lucy Li (Applied Mathematics, '21)

Jiang Li (Comparative Literature and Physics, '17)

Mateo Lincoln (Music and Comparative Literature, '19)

Theodore Motzkin (Classics and Near Eastern Languages & Civilizations, '19)

Judith Palfrey (History and Literature, '67), *professor of Pediatrics and Global Health and former faculty dean of Adams House*

Sean Palfrey (Biology, '67), *former faculty dean of Adams House*

Matthew Pasquini (Astrophysics and Physics, '16)

Rohan Pavuluri (Statistics, '18)

Drew Pendergrass (Physics and Mathematics, '20)

Dwight Perkins (Economics, PhD '64), *professor of Economics, emeritus*

Juliana Rodriguez (Social Studies, '19)

Stephen Peter Rosen (Government, '74, PhD '79), *professor of Government and former faculty dean of Winthrop House*

Laurence Tribe (Mathematics, '62, J.D. '66), *University Professor, emeritus*

Richard Tuck (honorary degree, AM '95), *professor of Government*

Richard Yarrow (History and Philosophy, '19)

Kangrong (Allison) Zhang (Applied Mathematics, '20)