

## President's Letter

*The State of the University, February 2019*

**Christopher L. Eisgruber**

Though the academic year is only half-complete, it has had many highlights already. One came on October's first weekend, when more than 3,000 Princeton alumnae gathered on campus for *She Roars*, the University's second conference to engage and connect female graduates. The event was spectacular, showcasing undergraduate and graduate alumnae whose talent and effort made them leaders in academia, the arts, business, government, the non-profit world, and many different professions. That it went smoothly is a credit to tireless and imaginative efforts of staff from departments throughout the University, including the Offices of Advancement, Facilities, Dining Services, Public Safety, Parking and Transportation, Athletics, and many more. I am grateful to all whose good work enabled us to succeed with the largest term-time gathering of Princeton alums in the University's history—wonderful though it was, we clearly reached a limit, and we will have to think creatively about how to succeed with *smaller* events in the future.

*She Roars* had many extraordinary moments, but the best-attended and most widely reported panel took place in Jadwin Gymnasium when Heather Gerken '91, Dean of Yale Law School, interviewed Supreme Court Justices Elena Kagan '81 and Sonia Sotomayor '76. As I looked around at the faculty members, alumni, staff, and students who gathered to hear from these three marvelous graduates of the University, I was reminded again of the importance and value of the transformative decisions that Princeton wisely made a half-century ago: to co-educate, to grow its undergraduate student body by nearly 300 students per year (an increase of more than 35 percent), and to accommodate this growth partly through the conversion of a hotel, the Princeton Inn, into the University's second residential college (it was later renamed Forbes College). Were it not for those decisions, many of the alums and students who gathered in Jadwin on that October afternoon would neither have experienced the transformative benefit of a Princeton education nor recorded the kinds of achievements and contributions to society that we celebrated at *She Roars*.

I was accordingly thrilled to announce in early December that Ronald O. Perelman and his daughter Debra G. Perelman '96 have made the lead gift to create what will become Perelman College. Construction of the College will enable us to expand our undergraduate population by 500 students overall—125 students per class (a little less than 10 percent)—and to say “yes” to more of the dazzling applicants who seek admission to Princeton University each year: we now turn down nearly 95 percent of those who apply, and many of those students are every bit as talented as the students whom we admit. The opening of Perelman College, Princeton's seventh residential college, will make this University stronger and better by permitting us to educate more outstanding students from all backgrounds and to continue to increase the socioeconomic diversity of our student body.

With momentum from this extraordinary gift, my colleagues and I in Nassau Hall head into the spring 2019 semester focused on ensuring that we expand wisely and effectively: preserving and indeed enhancing the distinctive features of Princeton's scholarly community, continuing to push the frontiers of world-class teaching and research, and proceeding in a way that genuinely values and respects every member of our community. These challenges are demanding in their own right, and all the more so in an unpredictable environment characterized by political, economic, and regulatory volatility. We must keep our values and priorities clearly in mind as we navigate forward in circumstances that present novel pressures along with real opportunities.

### *Planning for expansion*

We have been talking for some time about the desirability of being able to expand, and the Perelmans' generous gift moves us significantly closer to the day when we can make it happen. Our hope is to welcome the expanded class in the fall of 2022, and when we open Perelman College to be able to open an additional adjacent college simultaneously. Each of the new colleges would house around 500 students, but only half of those beds (the equivalent of a single college) will be used for expansion: building two colleges will permit us to renovate or replace dated facilities, such as the dormitories in Wilson College, that are no longer well-suited to our residential life program. Our timeline depends upon both an aggressive construction schedule and further fundraising to support individual dormitories in Perelman College and the second new residential college. Much remains to be done, but we are making excellent progress.

The two colleges will be located south of Poe Field, east of Elm Drive and across from the southern border of Butler College. Deborah Berke Partners, an award-winning architectural firm based in New York City, is leading the design team for the project. Architects Deborah Berke and Maitland Jones '87 and their colleagues have been meeting with key campus constituencies, including students, as they develop their plans for the new colleges. (Jones, incidentally, has a personal connection to the Princeton expansion that accompanied coeducation: his mother, Susan, was one of three female admission officers hired to select the first class of Princeton women!)<sup>1</sup> Their goal has been to design the new colleges "from the inside out," focusing first and foremost on the needs of the students who will inhabit the colleges, and seeking to nurture vibrant community and wellbeing in an era when distraction and stress are keenly felt.

Other planning is underway to ensure that when the new students arrive, the Princeton experience for all of our students is as good as or better than it was before expansion. The Academic Planning Group (APG) is taking steps to determine which academic departments may require additional resources to accommodate the increase in students. Though in exceptional cases (such as those requiring renovations to teaching laboratories) resources may be provided in advance of expansion, we will in general

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Weiss Malkiel, *"Keep the Damned Women Out": The Struggle for Coeducation* 186 (Princeton University Press 2016).

follow the same protocol as when we opened Whitman College: the provost will allocate resources as we see how the new students distribute themselves across courses and programs.

We will be enhancing Princeton's co-curricular facilities and programming to support the health and wellbeing of all our students as we prepare to expand. We have begun planning for a new University Health Services facility and securing gifts to support it. The facility will be designed to accommodate the growth of the student body, the changing needs of our students, and new models to provide wellness services. We are also planning to construct new recreational and fitness space to meet increasing demand. In addition, because the new residential colleges will displace our current softball and outdoor tennis facilities, we will be constructing new, improved facilities on the south side of Lake Carnegie.

In combination, these projects will enable us both to accept more students from a wide array of backgrounds and to reinforce the distinctive virtues that have made a Princeton education so valuable to, and so cherished by, this University's alumni. I have no doubt that the additional students we admit will thrive on this campus and use their education to contribute to society in countless ways, as generations of Princetonians have done before them.

### ***Planning for Wintersession***

By the time the new residential colleges open, we will be following a new academic calendar, approved by a substantial margin at a well-attended faculty meeting last spring. Under the new calendar, which goes into effect in the fall of 2020, fall term classes will start earlier than they previously did (either just before or just after Labor Day). The earlier start will enable us to preserve a week-long fall break and the same three-day Thanksgiving break that we have now. Fall term reading period and examinations, however, will now precede, rather than follow, the winter vacation. That change permits the creation of a two-week optional "Wintersession" in January that will allow students to participate in a variety of non-credit-bearing activities and classes.

Though we expect that the content of Wintersession will evolve and grow over time, we also believe that it is important for Wintersession to have a successful start. That will happen only if we develop a program that is attractive to students. We accordingly began our planning process by conducting focus groups with undergraduates, graduate students, and alumni. We discovered a strong appetite for creative activities, deep-dive learning experiences, service projects, and professional development opportunities. Students want to use Wintersession to engage with new ideas and activities, to reflect, and to explore the campus and the local region. They want neither traditional homework nor mandatory assignments, but they do want to feel that they have accomplished and learned something. We are taking these comments to heart as we work toward a selection of offerings for January 2021.

The opportunity to plan for Wintersession is a rare occasion in the University's history; it permits us to develop offerings different from anything in Princeton's current curriculum. We are excited by this prospect, and look forward to designing options that allow students to delve into topics of interest and branch out beyond the boundaries of conventional academic courses.

### *The innovation ecosystem and Lake Campus*

As I noted in [last year's edition of this letter](#), the lands south of Lake Carnegie present opportunities to extend the University's activity and identity in innovative ways. In addition to the athletic facilities mentioned earlier, what we are calling the Lake Campus will include new graduate student housing and provide infrastructure to strengthen connections between the University and the regional innovation ecosystem, including joint ventures with outside partners.

While we anticipate that Lake Campus will provide valuable additional capacity for collaborations that advance our teaching and research mission, we were able this fall to announce three trailblazing initiatives that will take place on or adjacent to the University's historic campus: the new Google AI Lab that opened on Nassau Street in January; a collaboration with Microsoft focused on microbiology and computational modeling; and a ten-year, \$6 million cooperative agreement between Celgene and the Princeton Catalysis Initiative.

In addition, our new wet-lab incubator space in Plainsboro, Princeton Innovation Center BioLabs, welcomed its first tenants last spring. Researchers on campus and in the broader entrepreneurial community have been enthusiastic about this addition to central New Jersey. In July, Governor Phil Murphy chose PIC BioLabs as the venue to announce two initiatives to support entrepreneurship and innovation in New Jersey; I am grateful to the Governor for supporting education, research, and innovation so energetically.

Projects like PIC BioLabs and the collaborations with Google, Microsoft, and Celgene are likely to be increasingly important to Princeton's research and teaching mission in years to come. Some of our best researchers are finding that collaborations with industry, non-profits, and others can stimulate their thinking and provide them with access to the colleagues, data, equipment, and resources required to solve some of today's hardest problems and develop innovative technologies. These projects also provide learning opportunities for graduate students and undergraduates, as well as pathways into careers beyond Princeton. As the Google, Microsoft, and Celgene initiatives all illustrate, our partners want to be as close as possible to the researchers and students on our campus. We anticipate, however, that as such ventures grow in number and size, the Lake Campus will become an attractive and proximate locale for some of them and thereby create new venues for faculty, students, and staff to pursue this University's mission of research, teaching, and service.

### *Renewing academic facilities on the main campus*

I expect Lake Campus to play a crucial role in advancing our teaching and research mission in the years ahead, but the vitality of that mission depends first and foremost on continuing to attract spectacular faculty and students and providing them with the resources and facilities they need for teaching and research of unsurpassed quality. We have now begun designing a series of buildings that are critically important to that goal. To be located along Ivy Lane and Western Way north of the football stadium, the new construction will replace aging buildings with modern facilities urgently needed to support cutting-edge research in computer science, engineering, and the environmental sciences and related fields.

Several additional projects to improve key facilities are in various stages of progress. Sir David Adjaye, an architect who is internationally admired for his inspiring work on the National Museum of African American History and Culture and other projects, is collaborating with Cooper Robertson to design the new Princeton University Art Museum. Renovations to Robertson Hall, principal home to the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, are underway; when completed, the project will make the building better suited to the programs that it serves. We are engaging architects for a much needed renovation of McCosh Hall, which houses the Department of English. And I look forward to celebrating completion of the decade-long renovation to Firestone Library this spring. The newly opened spaces have already proven popular with students; I hope you will agree with me that the architects for the project—Shepley Bulfinch and Fred Fisher—and our own teams in the Library and the Department of Facilities have done a spectacular job.

These capital projects presuppose substantial funding from gifts and the endowment. The news last year was positive on both fronts. Thanks to the generosity of our alumni and friends, and the superb efforts of Vice President for Advancement Kevin Heaney and his team, Princeton had one of the best fundraising years in its history. Much more remains to be done, however: we are in the process of planning for the University's next capital campaign, and its success will determine whether we can seize the opportunities we have identified through our strategic planning process and articulated in the University's strategic framework.

The Princeton University Investment Company (PRINCO), led by its president Andrew K. Golden and his talented staff, also had a superb year, reporting a best-in-class 14.2 percent return in the fiscal year ending June 30, 2018. The endowment's performance provides crucial support for the University's operations and aspirations. Markets have, of course, performed less favorably over the last seven months. We expect and plan for that kind of volatility, which tends to affect both the endowment and other revenue sources (including gifts) in parallel. Though a sustained and significant downturn could alter the timing for projects, we remain optimistic that we will be able to avoid delays to those now in the design phase.

## *The growing regulatory burdens on America's leading research universities*

We contend with volatility in the political as well as the economic sphere. In last year's letter, I commented at some length on the federal legislation that imposed a 1.4 percent excise tax on "the net investment income" from the endowment at Princeton and a small number of other colleges and universities. I noted that the actual incidence of the tax would depend upon the regulations developed by the Internal Revenue Service. Those regulations remain incomplete, so we still do not know the exact impact of the tax even for the past year.

Another area of regulatory flux involves Title IX, where the Department of Education has published proposed regulations that would reverse the departmental policies promulgated during the Obama administration and impose new requirements affecting how colleges handle complaints against students, staff, or faculty members. The Association of American Universities has submitted cogent and thorough comments criticizing some aspects of the proposed regulations, and we support the Association's position. The proposed regulations would apply both to student-on-student sexual misconduct cases and to complaints involving faculty members and staff. If the proposal is finalized without changes, the proposed regulations would compel us to make significant modifications to the procedures we use to investigate and adjudicate complaints of sexual harassment and assault.

The federal government's intrusive regulatory seesawing on these issues is, in my view, unfortunate and damaging. Sexual harassment cases are invariably fraught, requiring careful protection for the interests of both the accuser and the accused. There is no perfect set of rules to guarantee fairness; a successful system depends on, among other things, a community-wide sense of responsibility for the issues, clear policies and procedures, consistent expression of our values and expectations, and a commitment to learn from the experience of past cases. Those goals become difficult to achieve when the issue of sexual harassment is politicized, and right now it is being politicized from both sides of the partisan spectrum.

It would not be prudent or practical for us to undertake reforms now in response to the pending federal regulations, since their ultimate content remains for the time being unknowable. We expect, however, that we will have work to do on that front eventually, and we will keep the campus community informed as we learn more. In the meantime, the Faculty Advisory Committee on Policy (FACP) will continue its work to improve other aspects of our policies not affected by the proposed federal regulations; Dean Kulkarni and I described those issues and referred them to the FACP in a memorandum that we shared with the University community on September 24, 2018.

We also face a swelling wave of issues related to immigration policy. Because Princeton and all of America's great research universities depend for their excellence on talent drawn from around the world, we have spoken up prominently about immigration-related issues. I am grateful to General Counsel Ramona Romero, Vice President for Communications and Public Affairs Brent Colburn, the team in the Davis International

Center, and outstanding staff throughout the University for their diligent work on these issues.

In addition to filing *amicus* briefs and writing letters on several immigration issues, we remain co-plaintiffs with our alumna, Maria De La Cruz Perales Sanchez '18, and Microsoft in an important case challenging the federal government's rescission of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy. A federal district court ruled in our favor in April and reaffirmed that ruling in August; the case is currently on appeal. We continue to urge Congress to provide long-term relief for DACA beneficiaries; America benefits tremendously from the talent of these honest, hard-working young people who know this country as their home.

### ***The Harvard admissions suit and the meaning of "merit"***

In recent months, however, the case about which I am asked most often is not one involving Princeton directly. It is instead the lawsuit challenging Harvard's admission policies and alleging that Harvard has impermissibly discriminated against Asian American applicants. A few years ago, disappointed applicants made similar allegations against this University. The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) of the Department of Education investigated thoroughly, reviewing multiple years of Princeton admission records at great length. At the end of that investigation, OCR sent me a twenty-page letter with its findings. The letter evaluated Princeton's admission policies under the "strict scrutiny" standard, the most demanding standard in constitutional law. It concluded that:

[Princeton]'s use of race and national origin in admissions is consistent with the strict scrutiny standards established by the Supreme Court. The University sometimes considers race and national origin as factors in admissions, but OCR found no evidence that the University does so in a discriminatory manner. Instead, OCR found that the University pursues a compelling interest in student body diversity; and that the University, if it considers race or national origin in admissions, does so in a narrowly tailored manner in pursuit of that interest.

If you are interested in these issues, I urge you to read the [full letter](#); it gives a fair and detailed account of how Princeton uses race as one factor among others in our admission process. Though I have less familiarity with Harvard's admission policies and practices, I expect that Harvard, too, is complying with the strictest standards of constitutional law, and I hope that the court will find in Harvard's favor.

When people talk to me about the Harvard case, they sometimes ask me whether I think college admissions should focus more on "merit," by which they seem to mean test scores, grades, and other numerical indicators. I respond that I am all in favor of "merit," but I do not think that "merit" is ultimately about winning some sort of test-taking competition. I believe that "merit" means having the intellect, the imagination, the experience, the character, and the grit to benefit from a Princeton education and contribute to the education of your peers, plus the public-spiritedness and the drive to use

that education in a way that makes a positive difference in the world after you graduate. Test scores provide some useful evidence, but not the only evidence or the best evidence, of the relevant traits and abilities. At the end of the day, the numbers are imperfect proxies for what really matters. When we put together panels for events like *She Roars*, we look for alums with “merit” because they have done inspiring things with their Princeton education—but nobody cares one whit about their test scores in high school or the grades they got when they were here.

I wish, as do many others, that as we searched for merit and talent, we no longer had any need to take race into account. When I first encountered the Supreme Court’s initial affirmative action decision, *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, as a high school student in the 1970s, I would not have believed that the issue would remain hotly contested more than forty years later. I instead hoped and expected that our country would act quickly and forcefully to eliminate racial inequalities in schooling, in policing, in healthcare, in housing, and in employment. Had America done so, we would not need to consider race today when seeking the talent and perspectives essential to Princeton’s teaching and research mission. But America’s quest for equality remains unfinished, and so we at Princeton, like our counterparts at other leading research universities, continue to believe that we can best find the students who will make a difference on our campus and beyond if we consider race as one factor among others in a holistic admission process.

The trade-offs in the admission process are complex and difficult, but this much is straightforward and singularly important: every single student on this campus is here because of merit. All of our students are here because we have made a judgment, on the basis of exceptionally demanding standards, that they have what it takes to succeed at Princeton, to enhance the education of their peers, and to use their education “in the nation’s service and the service of humanity” after they graduate. That is true of our undergraduates and our graduate students. It is true of our athletes, our artists, our legacies, our first-generation students, and our students from every state and every country represented on this campus. They all have the talent needed to benefit from the transformative education made possible by our superb faculty and staff.

I am proud of all the students on this campus, and I wish only that we could say “yes” to more applicants from all backgrounds—which is why I am so grateful to Ronald Perelman and Debra Perelman for their extraordinary gift, and why I look forward so enthusiastically to securing the other gifts required to make our two new residential colleges a reality. I am also proud of—and grateful for—the work done by everyone on this campus to ensure that Princeton delivers the best possible teaching and research today, and to make this University even better in the future. I look forward to pursuing those goals together with all of you in the year ahead.