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By Matthew DeShaw ’18

It seems like yesterday that I was waiting on line for my dorm room keys, making casual conversation with fellow members of the Class of 2018.

The questions flew. “What’s your name? Where are you from? What dorm are you in?”

I met a lot of people that first month, and I wish I could have met more. But as the days turned into months, I’ve had the opportunity to meet other classmates, and I look forward to making the transition from dorm to House, freshman to sophomore.

Now that spring is in the air, we are left with more than just wider streets and the absence of snow piles. The realization has set in that we are the youngest class no longer. The Class of 2019 has been selected, and will be converging for Visitas this weekend! As I look back on the year since attending Visitas, I have to say that Harvard has not only met my expectations, it has exceeded them. My freshman year has been one of discoveries, a few of which I will share:

**Professors:** Any discussion of student life at Harvard College should begin with what makes our education so unique, the professors. Before arriving in Cambridge, I was told to expect the focus to be on graduate-level education, and that I would be lucky to have exposure to the professors I most frequently associate with the School. However, the contrary proved true. Not only did I have the opportunity to learn from the most famous names in their fields, but they also proved easily accessible in office hours or after class. There’s nothing like listening to a lecture and then reading further about the topic in a text with the professor’s name on the cover.

**Time:** I walked through Johnston Gate last August thinking I had all the time in the world. As a high school student with seven daily classes, cross-country and track, then homework, I usually went to bed around 2 a.m. While my bedtime has not changed much, my appreciation for time certainly has. I find myself sounding strangely like my parents, complaining how quickly time is passing. With classes to go to, homework to do, tests to study for, teams to run on, photos to take, articles to write, friends to see, emails to read, and meals to eat, I am growing to appreciate time (or the lack thereof). With academics, activities, and trying to experience everything Harvard has to offer, my life is diverse, fast-paced, frenetic, fun, fascinating, and I love every second of it.

**Freshman dean’s office:**During orientation, we were told that the dean’s office was there to provide support in times of need or help in our adjustment to freshman life. Whether it be for academic, administrative, or social issues, the office provides advice or help to every student seeking it. It is comforting to know that there is an office dedicated to making new students’ lives better.

**Cambridge:**Not only is Harvard its own little city, it happens to be situated within one of the most vibrant, cultured, and user-friendly places around. Cambridge is a pedestrian city, and Harvard is compact compared to some colleges. However, the amount of walking is surprising. Cambridge is so much more than a “college town.”

**Campus Gems:**The Harvard campus is chock-full of places ready to be explored. Each student will find favorites, but mine include the Peabody Museum and Natural History Museum for their interesting exhibitions, the Science Center Observatory for great views, Lamont Library for the most helpful staff, and my dorm. A Union dorm may not be at the top of every incoming freshman’s list, but it has proven to be a bonding experience. And its long walks are balanced out with the unique blend of people I’ve met.

**The Crimson:**The student-run newspaper keeps students and faculty up to date on news on campus and beyond, and provides much more. I joined The Crimson as a first-term freshman, and found it was as much a family as it was a newspaper staff. Currently, I am the sports photography executive for the multimedia board. The Crimson is always buzzing with activity, and has provided me an array of opportunities and experiences. Where else would a new-to-campus freshman receive a first assignment to shoot portraits of a well-known author? I never imagined that a newspaper could provide so much more than just news.

**Traditions:**There’s nothing that connects Harvard students more than engaging in campus traditions passed down from class to class, sometimes over centuries. From storming the Yard on Housing Day to cheering at The Game, there’s nothing quite like experiencing old traditions with fresh eyes. Participating with dorm-mates in intramurals in hopes of winning the coveted Yard Bucket, or going from House to House for the River Run, the traditions bind us to each other and to the past. I often wonder what the class of 1750 might think if they knew of the modern interpretation of Primal Scream.

**The T:**It didn’t take more than a day or two before I was introduced to the MBTA. This main artery transporting people around the Boston metropolitan area is vital to Harvard student life. On the days I have time to visit Boston or explore surrounding areas, the T provides quick, cheap, and easy transportation. It is (usually) on time and expands one’s horizons.

**Student Groups:**From the Asian American Association to the Wisconsin Club, at Harvard there is a group for every nearly race, religion, political belief, gender identity, sport, hobby, or academic interest. Student groups provide opportunities to bond with others with similar backgrounds or interests. For example, I am a member of Native Americans at Harvard College, a group that allows me to better understand my own identity as a multiethnic student at Harvard. In addition, I train and race with the Harvard Running Club. If by chance a student feels the need, he or she can create a novel student organization and apply for University funding. The diverse and interesting student groups are a big part of what makes Harvard a more intimate and bonded community.

**The People:**I moved into my dorm expecting to meet an accomplished and diverse student body, but I underestimated just how remarkable the Class of 2018 would be. The word diverse does not even come close to encapsulating the array of social, ethnic, academic, political, racial, and societal variation of the student body. This amalgam has opened my eyes to other viewpoints and motivated me to clarify my own. Over meals at Annenberg Hall or talking while walking to class, I have learned about and from my classmates. My fellow students motivate me to grow and develop into the best version of myself.

Even though I am still at the relative beginning of my educational journey, I see firsthand the transformative power of this miraculous institution. It’s helped me to grow and develop with every class, activity, event, and individual that I have encountered. I am still grateful for every day I wake up as part of 379 years of history, and wait to see what the 380th will hold.

*Matthew DeShaw is a freshman residing in Hurlbut Hall. He writes an occasional column about his experiences as a member of Harvard’s Class of 2018.*