

OFFICE OF ADMISSIONS AND FINANCIAL AIDS

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August 10, 1988

Cambridge City Council
Cambridge, MA 02138

Dear Council Members,

We are writing in response to the City Council's request for information about the financial aid offered by Harvard to Cambridge high school students. Before turning to the specific questions posed, we should like to say a little about the relationship of financial aid to admissions at Harvard and to give you a sense of the special place Cambridge has held in our admission policy and practice.

Harvard and Radcliffe owe much of their distinctive character to their historic connection with Cambridge. Indeed the quality of college life depends greatly on a healthy economic, social and political climate in Cambridge, and we have sought to contribute to this climate by educating as many talented young people as possible from the area. In recent years we have paid particular attention to applicants from Cambridge. In addition - and just as significantly - we have worked to increase the pool of good candidates from Cambridge, through direct approaches such as recruiting at the high schools as well as indirectly, through various programs and partnerships with Cambridge schools.

A happy result of these efforts is that we have been able to admit Cambridge students at rates significantly higher than the rates at which students have been admitted from other areas (usually about 50% higher). We believe we have in our pool many of the Cambridge high school seniors who would be strong candidates for Harvard and we give them special consideration in our selection process.

The previous remarks about our commitment to the admission of Cambridge students may seem an indirect way to begin to respond to questions about their financial aid. But the most significant feature of financial aid at Harvard is that we continue to assist every admitted student up to the level of his or her demonstrated need. At the same time, admission itself is "need-blind": that is, the Admissions Committee does not take into account applicants' financial need in making admissions decisions.

The combined effect of these two features of Harvard and Radcliffe admissions is that we can admit any promising student regardless of

family circumstances and assure the family of generous support if need can be shown. No needy student is admitted to the College but denied aid, and no student is turned away on account of financial need.

We have referred above to the special consideration given to applicants from Cambridge. Although we calculate the financial aid awards for Cambridge students in just the same way as we calculate awards for others, over the years a significant proportion of Cambridge students have received aid above the average levels of their respective classes.

In light of all that, in responding to your specific questions, we shall need to refer almost as much to the process of admissions as to financial aid. We shall take up your questions in order.

1. How is the program administered?

Financial aid awards are determined solely on the basis of a student's financial need. Awards do not take into account such non-need factors as unusual academic credentials, athletic ability, ethnicity or geographic area. Harvard does not award scholarships based on athletics, music or any factor other than need. In assessing a student's need, the financial aid committee considers the various resources available to the family - income and assets - as well as the current financial obligations of the family (such as, for example, educational expenses for other children). In those cases in which a reasonable family contribution is determined to fall short of overall expenses - as is the case for about two-thirds of Harvard and Radcliffe students - a financial aid "package" is designed. Such packages normally combine "self-help" (jobs and loans) with grant awards and families have some flexibility within the package.

A basic assumption is that education is an investment in the student's future. Having admitted a student, Harvard and Radcliffe think of that investment as a partnership among the student, the family and the College. Awards are reviewed every year or whenever family circumstances change. Financial aid renewal is not contingent on any particular achievements, such as grades, so long as a student is registered in the College.

2. How is it publicized?

Our need-blind admissions and need-based financial aid policies are described in all our publications, and through visits made by our thirty-plus admissions and financial officers and our nearly 4,000 alumni to thousands of schools and college fairs each year (and, locally, in a major fall event at Harvard for prospective applicants). The alumni/ae who conduct the interviews that are required of all applicants are other sources of this information. We are enclosing a packet of publications describing our financial aid policies.

It is important for the College that our approach to financial aid be understood by potential applicants. Although it has been inaccurate for decades, the image of Harvard as an institution for the wealthy still persists. A top institutional priority has been

to attract the ablest students regardless of financial circumstances. By dint of intensive publicity, we have succeeded in enrolling increasingly diverse and talented classes of a quality that would be unimaginable without our present financial aid policy, or without Harvard's willingness to commit \$25 million annually toward that purpose. Incidentally, the publicity surrounding the 350th celebration seems to have helped our efforts to persuade high school students and families that lack of financial resources need not stand in the way of enrollment at Harvard.

3. How are students selected?

As we have already suggested, students are not selected by a separate process into a "scholarship program". All students are admitted to the College through a single admissions process, and for those who are admitted, financial aid is calculated on the basis of individual financial need.

The admissions process is complex and thorough, and it begins with recruitment. Each geographic area (and in Greater Boston, each city) is assigned to a particular admissions officer. He or she works with schools and local alumni/ae to encourage promising students to consider Harvard. Various kinds of communication are used, including, for example, participation at college fairs and college nights, presentations by staff or alumni/ae in high schools, meetings and telephone contact with guidance counselors and distribution of our publications.

The officer responsible for Cambridge is one of the most experienced members of our staff, having been in this office for twenty years. He knows the schools well and works closely with counselors to identify promising potential applicants. Each application is first read by him and then by at least two other officers; applications may be read by more than three readers. Each case is presented by the area person for discussion by a subcommittee, whose members, in the case of Cambridge, include area persons for the City of Boston and Cambridge schools plus the Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid who by tradition chairs that particular subcommittee. (There are twenty other subcommittees reviewing cases from around the world.) The decisions made by each subcommittee are finally reviewed by the full committee, also chaired by the Dean.

To give you an idea of the magnitude of the task in the admissions year just past we reviewed a record 14,430 applications for 1600 spaces in the freshman class. Of these, probably 75% or 80% were qualified to do well academically here. Because our space constraints permit us to admit only about 14% of those who apply, we find ourselves in the unhappy position of turning away many very talented and appealing students (including over 70% of the valedictorians who applied.)

From Cambridge, however, we have admitted candidates in recent years at a rate averaging at least 50% higher than the overall rate. We have done so deliberately, by giving special consideration to Cambridge students. At each step of the

admissions process, the Committee reviews Cambridge students with special care and in the full awareness of the close relationship between Harvard and the City of Cambridge.

4. Who selects the students?

In the admissions process described above, the initial decisions are made by a seven person subcommittee which, in the case of Cambridge applicants, includes some of our most experienced officers. After this special review all decisions are finally reviewed by the full committee, consisting of some forty-five members of our staff and faculty members.

5. What has been the response over the past five years?

As we have reported, Cambridge applicants are given special consideration in our competitive admissions process. Of those who are admitted from Cambridge, a greater than average proportion receive financial aid; and the average award is larger. It should be emphasized that these results are produced by the relatively high need demonstrated by the families of admitted Cambridge students in our need-based financial aid award process.

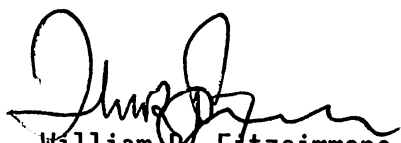
6. What are the minimum and maximum scholarship monies granted?

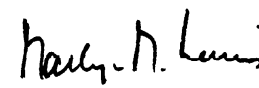
Scholarships range from \$500 to \$16,000. Last year the average financial aid package (consisting of jobs, loans and grants) was in excess of \$12,500. Cambridge residents received funding in part from scholarships restricted solely for use by students from the city's schools. Those restricted funds, including the Cunniff, Cambridge Latin, Cantabrigia, Ingols, and Buckley awards, provided in excess of one hundred thousand dollars in scholarships for undergraduates from the City.

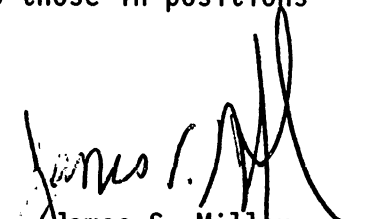
7. How are native Cantabrigians selected?

This question has been answered above.

We hope you find these responses helpful. Should you have further questions we would be glad to try to answer them. Our relationship with Cambridge and its schools is a matter of great importance to us for all the reasons mentioned in this letter, and we should be grateful to you for anything you can do to make our interest known to those in positions to influence young people in the city.


William R. Fitzsimmons
Dean of Admissions and
Financial Aid

Yours sincerely,

Marlyn McGrath Lewis
Director of
Admissions


James S. Miller
Director of
Financial Aid

MML:jwa
Enclosures

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Comm. from William R. Fitzsimmons, Dean of Admissions & Financial Aid, Marilyn McGrath Lewis, Director of Admissions & James S. Miller, Director of Financial Aid, Harvard University, in response to the request of the Council for information
Re: financial aid offered to Cambridge high school students.

In City Council,

September 19, 1988

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See order attached