

UNIVERSITIES

Creaming the Cream

ENTRY into the Harvard Graduate School looks like becoming even more competitive than it is already. Harvard of all universities is worried about the quality of its graduate students and their courses. Lesser fry among the universities can be forgiven for thinking their future is bleak. According to a committee of five Harvard professors under the chairmanship of Professor R. Lee Wolff (History) and including two scientists, Professors W. N. Lipscomb and R. N. White, the quality of students in the Graduate School is being sacrificed for quantity. After a year of study, the committee has reached the conclusion that Harvard's national duty is not to make its Graduate School larger but to make it even more of an academic élite. Over the past 17 years the number of graduate students has increased by 63 per cent while the faculty has increased by only 33 per cent and the number of undergraduates by a mere 13 per cent. It is this imbalance and the surprisingly high rate of attrition which the committee seeks to redress—only 65 per cent of the men who entered the school in 1959–60 have, or are expected to get, their PhD, and the drop-out among the women is even higher.

It makes several recommendations designed "to bring graduate students more quickly and surely into the fellowship of the academic community", including such peripheral things as the establishment of a social centre—a non-residential equivalent of the undergraduate Harvard Houses. The real crux of the problem is to increase individual attention, and the committee's solution is to cut back on enrolment. It suggests that the target for 1975 should be 2,400 students, 20 per cent less than the current enrolment of more than 3,000. The draft, of course, will make this easy to achieve in the short run; in 1968, enrolment was 17 per cent down on the 1967 level and the draft is expected to make further inroads on enrolment this autumn. What worries the committee is the prospect of strong pressures for increased enrolment should the Vietnam War end.

The committee says that graduate students are already more mature and "less willing than their predecessors to accept graduate education as we are accustomed to conducting it". It hints that veterans of the Vietnam war may be even less inclined to accept traditional graduate school life. The committee's formula for "the making of scholars" and the contented graduate student is increased attention. Within the academic departments, it urges the development of "workshops" and small laboratory groups with a few students sitting at the feet of a senior scholar. It also advocates more flexible courses, a review of grading practices and curricular requirements in consultation with the students and a graduate student ombudsman in each department to investigate complaints. The aim of all this is to make tailor-made courses for each student's doctoral programme.

Recognizing that a first publication is the greatest of all morale boosters for the wretched graduate student, the committee says that faculty in the humanities and social scientists should emulate their colleagues in the natural sciences and encourage students to publish. The committee also finds that "a PhD is still a PhD and has not entirely been superseded by evidence

of a postdoctoral fellowship as the passport to the groves of academe". It has therefore made no recommendations about postdoctoral fellowships but instead contents itself with saying that "some departments did indicate that it would be a nice idea to bring back a promising PhD for a year's further residence and research at Harvard within, say, five years after the award of his degree".

RESEARCH GRANTS

Reproduction Multiplies

THERE seems no shortage of funds for reproductive physiologists. Anyone who has recently discovered that research into bacteria and phage no longer qualifies as Cancer Research, Space Research or Heart Research might do worse than look for tenuous links with reproductive physiology. The big foundations, Rockefeller and Ford in particular, are vigorously fostering the study of human reproduction.

Harvard University is in the van of the expansion. In July, the first sod of what is now a car park at the Medical School will be lifted to mark the start of the building of a new six-floor laboratory to house the Medical School's Laboratory of Human Reproduction and Reproductive Biology. When completed in August 1970, the \$4.5 million laboratory will have 64,500 square feet of floor space. The laboratory will be entirely devoted to research—there will be no outpatient or inpatient facilities—and to teaching, with the emphasis on postgraduate and postdoctoral teaching.

The new building has been financed jointly by the Ford Foundation, the Avalon Foundation and the US Public Health Service. The Rockefeller Foundation has chipped in \$2 million to support the faculty and staff for the first ten years. Dr R. O. Greep, Professor of Population Studies in the Faculty of Public Medicine, has been appointed the director. With characteristic ambition, Harvard expects the laboratory to become a centre for reproductive physiologists in the universities of the Greater Boston area, and that it will cover all aspects of the discipline. A Harvard spokesman said that "the broad scope of the research will extend from the development of eggs and sperm to the newborn", and research into infertility and male and female contraception will be a major preoccupation.

On a very much more modest scale, the University of Liverpool has also benefited from the Ford Foundation's concern about world population growth. The foundation has given the university a grant of £60,000 to set up a unit for research into male reproduction. The Wellcome Trust has added a further £14,000 for equipment and the Agricultural Research Council has given £2,242 because the work may be relevant to veterinary medicine. The long term aim of the unit, which is to be headed by Dr Timothy Glover, whose work on the neurovascular control of sperm production is currently supported by the MRC, is to provide basic information on sperm maturation. The unit will apparently work on a wide range of animals as well as man, which explains the ARC's involvement, and ultimately the research may be useful in the treatment of infertility and the development of male chemical contraceptives for men. This, however, is only one of the potential benefits of the schemes now planned.