



HARVARD-WESTLAKE SCHOOL

The Kutler Center for Independent Research and Interdisciplinary Studies

Thanks to a generous lead gift by Jon and Sara Kutler, Harvard-Westlake School is pleased to announce the creation of the Kutler Center for Independent Research and Interdisciplinary Studies. The Kutler Center will be named for Brendan Kutler, a member of the class of 2010, who died suddenly and unexpectedly in December 2009. At a school where there are many wonderful students, Brendan was a superstar – a serious intellectual with a luminous personality, a young man who excelled in high-level math and science classes but sampled from every academic department. And Brendan was an especially good person – a generous and thoughtful friend to many and an unassuming leader of his class. He loved our school, and his teachers and classmates loved him.

Over the past several months, Brendan’s parents, Jon and Sara, have engaged the School in a conversation about creating a lasting and meaningful memorial to their son at Harvard-Westlake. Their thinking and ours converged when we began to focus on the qualities that made Brendan a truly special intellect and human being. Brendan thrived in situations where he could figure things out on his own (independent research); and he enjoyed making connections among disparate academic disciplines (interdisciplinary study). What better tribute to Brendan Kutler than a program focused on those endeavors!

The Kutler Center will be both an entity and a program, classrooms and a curriculum, a space for student collaboration and new opportunities for them to learn collaboratively. Most simply described, it is a new academic department, complete with a director, a facility, a faculty, a program, and a mission: to cultivate and sustain independent research and interdisciplinary studies at Harvard-Westlake.

And where better to house this exciting new program than at the academic hub of the upper school campus, the Mudd Library. The Kutler Center for Independent Research and Interdisciplinary Study will be the umbrella organization for all independent research and interdisciplinary study at Harvard-Westlake. It will also be the clearinghouse for the development and awarding of all on- and off-campus academic research opportunities and summer internships for students. Jon and Sara Kutler have added their generous lead gift to

the outpouring of gifts to the Brendan Kutler memorial fund to help create this vibrant center of intellectual activity in their son's memory.

Independent Research

In the last few years, we've made the development of independent study programs a priority, supporting the Science Department's Scientific Research (SSR) course and, this year, initiating an analogous course in History. We've cultivated summer internships for students in scientific laboratories all over the city and are presently seeking to identify similar opportunities in the humanities and social sciences. Significant resources (both personnel and facilities) are devoted to this program. It is expensive, but there are few things that can be more transformative – especially for bright, inquisitive kids – than this kind of endeavor: initiating a project, not knowing where they're going at the outset, making some mistakes, working with a mentor, putting in the time, and finding a bit of Truth in the end. We will buttress our growing independent study program by giving it a permanent home and a leader – by creating a facility to house the Kutler Center and designating a Center Director to lead and manage this burgeoning program.

Interdisciplinary Study

The Kutler Center will be the “department” for teachers who develop and teach interdisciplinary studies courses, thus supporting faculty development and cross-department collaboration, leading to curricular innovation. Suggestions for interdisciplinary courses have been made and include: American Studies (History and English); Bioethics (Biology and Philosophy); a Leadership Course (Philosophy, History, Literature); Comparative Religion (History, Religion, Literature); Videogame Production, a course that would bring together artists, writers and computer programmers to participate in a collaborative (interdisciplinary) creation of a videogame. A senior-year “capstone” course focused on ethical decision-making and leadership has also been suggested.

Every Outstanding Harvard-Westlake Program Has a Home and a Leader

Our vision is to house the Kutler Independent Research and Interdisciplinary Studies program in a new facility that physically connects our history department classrooms and offices in the Seaver Building with the Mudd Library. We will carve out space in Mudd Library, break through some exterior walls, and create a contemporary complex of three classrooms and a Center Director's office that literally forms a physical bridge between two buildings and integrates the departments that most use the library into the library, making Mudd Library much more accessible and integral – making it the academic hub of the school. Mudd Library itself is a sturdy structure but quite outdated, so our vision for the revitalization of

this new “academic row” includes significantly updating that facility. Our modernized 21st century library will still contain books, but there will also be dedicated space for collaborative work, and additional computer portals for completing online research. This will be the most significant improvement to our upper school campus in a decade, and the benefits to our students will be immeasurable and long lasting.

To create and nurture an outstanding Independent Research and Interdisciplinary Study program, and to do it right, we plan to utilize classrooms near the center of campus, a Center Director to keep the program focused and vital and, then, great teachers to develop and teach the courses. This concept has already generated excitement and support from the faculty, as it presents opportunities for the kind of innovative teaching that appeals to many of our best Harvard-Westlake teachers.

Great schools are ever-evolving. Thanks to Jon and Sara Kutler’s generous lead gift and Harvard-Westlake’s commitment to raising the necessary funds, we are certain that this step in Harvard-Westlake’s evolution is a critically important one, one that will further reinforce our reputation for academic excellence and innovation.

Jeanne Huybrechts
Head of Harvard-Westlake School
June, 2010