At the School of Public Health, Dean Robert Meenan (MED’72, GSM’89) asked his board for thoughts on where the school should expand its international programs, which are mostly in African countries. Rather than add more in Third World countries, they suggested that SPH should look at India and China, where the University overall should have more connections.

“A regular form of external feedback is helpful,” says Meenan. “Otherwise you get insular, and that’s a problem.”

At the College of Communication, Dean Thomas Fiedler (COM’71) has wrestled with how the school can better prepare students for a rapidly evolving media. Fiedler worked for two years assembling his board, which includes Jason Binn (COM’90), founder and directory of luxury magazine publisher Niche Media, Harold Burson (Hon.’88), founder of the influential PR firm Burson-Marsteller, and Jay Roewe (COM’79), senior vice president at HBO.

Roewe says he was happy to join the board because it was a way to give back to the school. “It’s also interesting to go into academia and hear where people think they are going,” he says. “And I find it stimulating to be around smart people.”

The group is hashing out ways that the school, with its aging facilities, can integrate digital media into the curriculum. The board’s advice: build a new wing with state-of-the-art facilities on par with similar schools. Now they are helping COM make that happen, Fiedler says. Board member Maya Ezratti (COM’98), director of community and public affairs for GL Homes, visited the University of Miami’s School of Communication recently to see how its facilities compared to COM’s. Ray Kotcher (COM’79), CEO of the advertising and public relations firm Ketchum, advised the dean on the kind of data he’ll need to persuade people to put their money behind the new wing.

“That’s the kind of advice that Ketchum clients pay huge sums of money to get,” Fiedler says. “I can’t overestimate the value of the advisory board.”

Online daily deal sites like Groupon are generally great for consumers, offering deep discounts on things from restaurants to sporting events. But are they good for business?

John Byers, a College of Arts & Sciences associate professor of computer science, and Georgios Zervas (GRS’11), a postdoctoral fellow at Yale, worked with Michael Mitzenmacher, a professor of computer science at Harvard, to find out. The researchers, who collected a massive amount of data over a six-month period, found that for merchants, Groupon cuts both ways.

From January 3 to July 3, 2011, the researchers monitored every Groupon deal offered in 20 cities—16,692 deals altogether. At the same time, they collected data on Facebook “likes” tied to the deals and later gathered data from the daily deal site LivingSocial and the review site Yelp. For each Groupon deal associated with a Yelp rating, the researchers collected all of the reviews posted on Yelp through August 2011. They found a surge in reviews from new customers after a Groupon offer, but they also found that reviewers mentioning the words “Groupon” and “coupon” give “strikingly lower rating scores” than those who do not mention those terms. Reviewers mentioning either keyword offer ratings that are 10 percent lower, on average, while the ratings of the small fraction of reviewers mentioning both keywords are more that 20 percent lower, on average.

The findings, published last September in the online journal arXiv (pronounced “archive”), call into question the very foundation of daily deal sites.