curriculum, fit in study abroad if desired, and even pursue those “secondary fields.” The joint concentrations would be grandfathered. And although the committee encouraged group projects and other non-traditional forms of “capstone experiences,” the EPC’s previous skepticism about senior theses was moderated. Laibson and other members also explicitly recognized the role of much better advising in making deferred concentration choice and other presumed benefits of curricular freedom work. Resolving those details will precede legislation, presumably by this spring.

**“The Genius of the Balafon”**

In west africa, Neba Solo, born Souleymane Traoré in 1969, is often called “the genius of the balafon,” says Ingrid T. Monson. So skilled a player, composer of songs, singer, and innovator is he that in 2002 his homeland, Mali, named him a chevalier de l’ordre national. “He’s a bit like the Charlie Parker and the Charles Mingus of the balafon combined—the Charlie Parker because he is so virtuosic and the Mingus because he is an incredible composer as well,” says Monson, the Quincy Jones professor of African-American music. (A sometime performer on the trumpet herself, she has recorded five albums with the Klezmer Conservatory Band, of which she was a founding member.) At her instigation, the Committee on African Studies and the Department of Music brought Solo and his group of musicians and dancers to Harvard for a week this fall, culminating in a rollicking concert in Sanders Theatre on November 10.

Earlier, speaking in French with Monson translating, Solo explained about balafons to 35 students, music professors, and the merely curious at a lecture-demonstration in Loker Commons that was sponsored by the Office for the Arts’ Learning from Performers series. A balafon is a wooden xylophone with an open-ended calabash resonator below each slat. These gourd resonators each have a second, small hole through which air exits; each hole is covered by a tightly stretched membrane—perhaps of spider-cocoon fibers or cigarette paper, although Solo uses plastic—which adds an abrasive buzzing sound when the slat is struck hard. Solo played and sang and one of his group danced. He then took questions and invited listeners to come forward and have a go at the slats themselves.

The balafon has many musical cousins around the world—the concert xylophone, the glockenspiel, the vibes played by such jazzmen as Lionel Hampton and Gary Burton, Latin America’s marimba, Indonesia’s gamelan orchestra—ingredients both percussive and melodic.

When Solo was 18, he heard Alpha Blondy’s reggae recording Jerusalem, admired the bass line, and conceived a desire to tamper with his traditional 17-slat balafon by adding three bass slats and altering the tuning. His balafonist father was not at all sure about the propriety of this, but gave permission for the experiment on condition that if he did not like the result, Solo would desist from innovation. The son wrought his changes and, moreover, built a balafon that he played exactly backwards, soloing with his left hand on the lower notes and playing the accompaniment with his right hand, “adding,” says Monson, “some very complicated and interesting bass lines to the texture of the music.”

His father approved. At his lecture-demonstration, Solo deconstructed, first playing a line of music with his right hand, then adding a different line with his left hand, then bursting into song with a third line. “Not many balafonists sing while they play,” says Monson, “but he wanted to do something different.” (To hear Neba Solo perform, go to www.harvardmagazine.com.)

He does not sing about his beating heart, incidentally. The traditional role of the musician in Mali, says Monson, is not only to entertain, but to present messages and promote dialogue on contemporary social issues. Solo’s compositions comment on vaccination, AIDS, female excision, protecting the environment, political corruption, and the role of custom in modern life. Traditionally the balafon is played at all sorts of social events: festivals, dances, fut...
Allston Planning Explained

A room in the Holyoke Center Arcade has been fitted out to help Harvard planners communicate the University’s aspirations for an Allston campus. The move follows the release of a 40-page interim planning report last June that was intended to generate feedback from the University community, neighbors, and the general public. The display, which consists of watercolor drawings and schematics mounted on the walls and suspended by wires between floor and ceiling, as well as a tabletop scale model, has been open to the public this fall by appointment. Visitors are accompanied by a guide who outlines the first-phase plans—encompassing the next 10 to 15 years—and then the longer-term possibilities for development that will span two to three generations. Planners say they hope to elicit more comments before issuing a final framework report by June, and, they hope, an institutional master plan to be submitted to the City of Boston.

Even without that, planning for two 500,000-square-foot science buildings is proceeding rapidly, premised on the urgent need for space to house promising collaborative scientific ventures like the Harvard Stem Cell Institute. This past summer, four competing architects were asked to design one of these buildings and to propose a location for the second. (Meanwhile, six and a half floors of the laboratory space at Harvard Medical School’s new 430,000-square-foot research building are being leased to Harvard-affiliated hospitals for various terms, and more rental lab space is being constructed in the Longwood area. Future plans for the space now occupied by lessees are on hold for the moment, said an HMS spokesperson, pending clarity on the University’s plans to develop Allston.)

The Allston planners must proceed with a major piece of the puzzle not yet settled: the fate of the Charlesview Apartments, a soccer anthem, and Can 2002, a soccer anthem, and has since made several albums, among them Kené Balafons. He first came to the United States in 2003 for the Smithsonian Folk Festival. “I can testify,” says Monson, “that I saw in Mali a balafon contest in which several groups got up and tried to play like him. But there’s only one Neba Solo.”

Ph.D. Policy

When she became dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS) last July, it was something of a homecoming for Theda Skocpol, Thomas professor of government and sociology. She is a card-carrying alumna, Ph.D. ’75. Based on her experiences as student, faculty member, and now dean, Skocpol judges the graduate school “unparalleled in the services it offers students,” both in admissions to its 55 doctoral programs and, of late, in financial aid. (With recent enhancements guaranteeing humanities and social-sciences students four years of support plus a fifth year of funding to write dissertations, Harvard is again “very competitive with the top graduate schools,” she says.)

What GSAS lacks, she says, is “top-level faculty involvement.” Such engagement has been conspicuously provided for undergraduate education in the past 15 years through the ministrations of the Educational Policy Committee (EPC), chartered within the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS), which regularly reviews each College concentration: requirements, course sequence, teaching. Of late, the faculty’s review of the curriculum has also had wide impact (see page 56).

Skocpol set about remedying that deficiency promptly. As her first order of business, she announced at the first faculty meeting of the year, on September 27, the formation of a Graduate Policy Committee (GPC) charged with three missions: advising the GSAS and FAS deans on mat-