by 15,000 people in Tercentenary Theatre in the fall of 2008, keynoted by Al Gore '69, L.L.D. '94. “Sustainability at Harvard is about more than recycling and turning off lights,” it states. “It’s about shifting the culture of an institution and inspiring the next generation of environmental leaders.”

These data, compiled by Henriksen’s office, highlight the current status of Harvard’s progress toward achieving the sustainability goals:

GHG emissions: Emissions were reduced 16 percent from fiscal 2006 to 2012, despite the three million square feet of growth on campus during that period. Excluding that growth, emissions in fiscal 2006 “base buildings” have dropped 24 percent. As of 2012, 23 percent of electricity is generated from renewable or alternative energy sources.

Green Buildings: As of October 2012, the University has 78 certified and 23 registered LEED building projects (a project must be registered before it can be evaluated for certification).

Energy Conservation: To date, a thousand energy-conservation measures have been implemented, yielding an annual savings of $3 million.

Green Loan Fund: To date, the fund has loaned more than $15 million to various campus schools and departments supporting nearly 200 projects that have yielded more than $4 million in energy savings annually.

For further information, including data on transportation, solid waste, and water usage, see the website at http://report.green.harvard.edu.

A Community Innovation Lab

Imagine a large blank bulletin board hanging in the middle of Upham’s Corner in Dorchester covered with stickers that read “Upham’s Corner is...the best Cape Verdean food” or “Upham’s Corner is...the place I grew up”—designed to spark discussions about community identity. Or a themed website for the Strand Theater there that would host a resource portal with a local feel—to attract neighborhood businesses. Or interactive, multi-touch panels running along both sides of the entryway of the affordable housing project Orchard Gardens—to serve as a community spotlight and increase residents’ engagement.

In the fall class “Solving Problems Using Technology,” students from Harvard’s Kennedy School (HKS) and Graduate School of Design (GSD) teamed up with three community groups in Boston and the Mayor’s Office of New Urban Mechanics to make these “big ideas” a reality in the Dudley and Upham’s Corner neighborhoods.

Guided by visiting Stanton professor of the First Amendment Susan Crawford and assistant professor of urban planning Michael Hooper, GSD and HKS students worked together in nine different interdisciplinary teams to enhance projects already undertaken by their partner community groups and to develop their own unique ideas for addressing urban and civic challenges. At the end of the semester, the teams presented their projects to their community partners, community residents, and mayoral representatives at Hibernian Hall in Dudley Square. The mayor’s office, Crawford said, will implement the best of the student designs.

The GSD students focused mainly on participatory planning and design, the HKS students on implementation of the ideas. The “novel and exciting” structure of the class, Hooper says, brings students with various interests together and gives them direct experience in solving real community issues. In groups of four to six, students tackled questions such as how can an affordable housing project serve as a model for a twenty-first-century public space and involve residents in the design process? How can the housing project’s board form a strong link between residents and City Hall? What can be done to draw people from other parts of Boston to shop, eat, and see a show in Upham’s Corner? How can technology enhance the visual identity of this area?

Students began by learning about the Dudley area before homing in on specific community needs with their partners—the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative, the Orchard Garden Residents Association, and the Upham’s Corner Main Street Initiative—and brainstorming solutions, narrowing their focus to one “big idea” they deemed most workable. The second half of the course was the lab portion—a user-centered design class that brings all the students together in Harvard’s I-Lab to work on their projects. “A lot of projects at the end of a term go on your C drive, they’ve been a great experience, but that’s the end,” Hooper said during the first class meeting. “The hope here is that these projects can see the light of day, be implemented, and live beyond your computer.”

One group’s members—Alex Tischenko, Jean You, Beth Lundell Garver, and Rodrigo Davies—focused on a way to make Dorchester North Burying Ground, one of the oldest cemeteries in the country, a recognized landmark and a stronger asset to the Upham’s Corner community. Their solution was to transform the “experience on the ground” through an annual community day bridging economic, cultural, and generational boundaries: “Living Souls Day”—an event in collaboration with local arts groups featuring dance performances, food, music, and fun. “We want to work with these groups to co-design a story and interactive production,” said You during the group’s presentation at Hibernian Hall in December. “It will be a cultural celebra-
I remember getting very worried during my freshman year. People seemed to care about grades and GPAs and extracurriculars an awful lot more than I did. I found myself getting stressed in spite of myself—stressing about not being stressed. I was worrying about not being worried, caring about not caring about what other people cared about. These concerns seemed the silliest of things, but for my freshman self, they were quite real. Never before had I been more conscious of other people’s notions of what success meant, and of how off I was from those measures. I didn’t want to spend hours cranking out essays that I wasn’t interested in so I could “do well.” I didn’t want to do problem sets for that reason, or anything, for that matter. To me, the notion of “doing well” just didn’t matter—not in the sense that appeared to be that of my freshman peers, at least. At that point, and at points since, I did what any young idea-lover does. I knelt before my bookshelf, as if before an altar, and I asked the divine souls of characters and authors what I should do. With knees and ego bent, I searched the titles, looking for one that promised salvation. I knew the stories they contained, but wanted to remind myself of them, to take my mind out of my head for a while, and put another one in. I found the most beautiful of minds; those of poets and dreamers, of clairvoyants and philosophers. I spent hours with them, curled up in corners of far-off spaces, unraveling intrigue and the present tense, slowly untying their knots. But, this didn’t seem to be enough, my present never fully spoke to these writers’ pasts. No matter what wisdom their tomes conveyed, the voices of the dead and distant minds I was convening with weren’t able to speak back to me; they could only ever speak forward, toward lives and times they never lived. And I could only look back, retracing their steps to hunt for answers where they did not necessarily appear. So at that point, and at points since, I did what any young idea-lover does, and sought out someone wiser and more well-read than I, to see what she could see. I went to office hours. I went to the office of the professor of my freshman seminar—a seminar about different modes of reading books and the world. I didn’t really have a question, more a series of worries and emotions: about how the freshman culture of thought fixated on grades and conventional pat-on-the-back success made me feel like a lonely idler in the midst of a checklist, about to be crossed out; about how far away the lives of people I knew seemed, across seas and schedules; about how learning unsettled, and about how difficult it was for me to continue thinking of myself as a me in the middle of all these thoughts and contradictions. In other words, at that point, and at points since, I’ve had what any young person, middle-aged person, or old person has had: a glaring existential crisis of perforating doubt.

My professor sat and listened to me.