The Harvard Progressive Advocacy Group works for community-directed social change in Massachusetts. Through political advocacy efforts, we collaborate with marginalized communities as they build power.
# HPAG

Harvard Progressive Advocacy Group

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The Basics

The Harvard Progressive Advocacy Group was founded in the fall of 2002, in order to connect service projects and political activism, as well as to engage Harvard students in the communities around them. HPAG has since worked with community groups throughout Boston on projects that have involved lobbying policy-makers, conducting research, and creating advocacy resources. HPAG is a member of the Phillip Brooks House Association, the Political Network of the Institute of Politics, and the Harvard Social Forum.

The Structure of HPAG:
HPAG consists of four issue-based advocacy groups: Chinatown, Education, Housing and Homelessness, and Prison Reform Advocacy. Four committees support the work of these groups:

Steering committee: Steercom includes the HPAG Director, Finance Chair, Information and Technology Chair, Media Chair, Legislative Chair, Development Chair and the four Issue Group Directors, but is open to all members of HPAG. Steercom exists to coordinate and support the work of other committees, as well as to make decisions regarding HPAG’s policies and procedures.

Development committee: HPAG Development works to develop HPAG as an entity, handling inter-group relations and relations between HPAG and others (communities, faculty, etc). HPAG Development has simple goals. We strive to strengthen HPAG today and simultaneously build the sustainability of HPAG’s work for the future. We work to provide students with productive and enjoyable involvement with progressive advocacy. We help HPAG get things done. Katie DiSalvo (disalvo@fas.harvard.edu) is Development Chair.

Media committee: This committee co-ordinates and creates media resources, such as op-eds and press releases, for HPAG. An HPAG newsletter is in the works. Greg Schmidt (gschmidt@fas.harvard.edu) is Media Chair.

Legislative committee: LegCom is a forum for members of the four issue groups who work directly with political institutions (the Legislature, City Council, etc) to come together in order to share knowledge, contacts and experiences. Through this, HPAG ensures that each of its efforts compliment each other, and the organization gains a unified legislative agenda. Andrew Golis (golis@fas.harvard.edu) is Legislative Chair.
**Education Advocacy Group**

Contact: Grant Devine ([devine@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:devine@fas.harvard.edu))

The HPAG Education Group is committed to hearing and amplifying the voices and concerns of Boston and Cambridge youth. The HPAG Education family endeavors to advocate for educational equality and justice for all youth in Massachusetts. Through partnerships with local high school youth, college students, academics, community groups, and legislators we seek teach others and ourselves about healthy youth development in and out of the classroom.

This year’s plans include the following:

> recording an audio/radio project featuring youth reflections on the state of Massachusetts schools;

> researching and advocating on the effect of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) on the drop out rate among high school youth;

> producing and mastering an audio CD of local youth’s music, poetry, and testimony;

> co-ordinating a monthly safe space/open mic/ for Harvard mentor and mentee pairs that will foster youth directed discussions, arts workshops, movie screenings, food and a safe and engaging party spot; and

> participating in a mentoring program for youth at the local high school.

This year we hope to partner with the Peace and Justice Corps of Cambridge Rindge and Latin, The Civil Rights Project of HLS and the School of Education, and Citizens for Public Schools in addition to our other partners.
Housing & Homelessness Advocacy Group

Contact: Sarah Rea (rea@fas.harvard.edu)

HPAG’s H&H team seeks to forge relations with community members who have been affected by city and state policies concerning the availability and standards of low-income housing, and the current regulations surrounding both the distribution of resources for the homeless and the condition of those services. We use our dedication, human resources and skills in research, writing and interpersonal relations, working in coordination with constituents aiming to solve these problems for the long-term.

In our one year of existence, we have been involved with multiple efforts: to determine "What's working, what's not working and what's missing" from the situation of homelessness in Boston with Solutions at Work in Cambridge, to normalize the zoning and health standards for neighborhood housing projects across Boston with a collaboration in Dorchester, and to investigations of unregulated eviction companies with a group of Boston lawyers. Housing celebrated a major success this summer with the passage of a bill which will protect the belongings of individuals evicted from their apartments. Such belongings were previously often stored at gouged rates, stolen, or inaccessible to their owners.
Chinatown Advocacy

Contact: Jacquelyn Chou (jchou@fas.harvard.edu)

The Chinatown Advocacy Group works on issues of immigrant empowerment in Boston's Chinatown, in collaboration with neighborhood organizations such as the Chinese Progressive Association and the Asian Community Development Corporation. There are a myriad of injustices that occur in Chinatown that reflect the economic, social, and political disparities that exist throughout Boston. Chinatown residents face issues of inadequate housing, workers rights abuses, and denial of government benefits, as well as difficulties in accessing the political process to deal with those issues. Abuses of Chinatown residents' rights and land occur time and time again because of Chinatown's lack of a voice in the city and state political system. We strive to give a voice to the Chinatown residents, help them tap into available resources, and ultimately rectify the discriminatory treatment allowed through the system. The root of many of the problems that exist in Chinatown lies in the fact that many of the residents in Chinatown are immigrants. In our society, immigrants are a group of people that distinctly lack a role in our political system, and therefore have very minimal political clout.

In an effort to empower and give a voice to the underrepresented and underprivileged, the Chinatown Advocacy Group will begin the year working on an election push which will include election monitoring, voter registration, voter education workshops, and Get Out The Vote drives. Additionally, we will also be pursuing a campaign to attain a multilingual ballot to ensure that citizens of Boston do not have just the nominal right to vote, they also have the ability to exercise it. Further, we hope as well to begin to help Chinatown residents access necessary services through an “access to benefits” campaign.
Prison Advocacy

Contact: Rabia Mir (mir@fas.harvard.edu)

The Prison Reform Advocacy group aims to create change in the Massachusetts correctional system through collaboration with prisoners, ex-prisoners and other representatives of the communities that the prison system impacts most profoundly. We work closely with the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) and All of Us or None of Us, a group of ex-prisoners. The group is also part of a larger community-based campaign for prison reform, the Campaign to Build Safer Communities. In the state house, we work closely with Senator Barrios, Senator Wilkerson and Representative Fox. City Councillor Chuck Turner is also a close associate. This year will also be our first year collaborating with prison education groups on campus, as well as with the Black Men's Forum.

Last spring term began with an education day at the state house on February 9, 2004. This was aimed at educating the legislature about the need for prison reform. During the summer we participated in the Boston Social Forum through a popular education workshop we have developed titled “Racial Disparities: Into the funnel of injustice.” This is a two-hour workshop which contextualizes the prison crisis in terms of political, economic, and social events. The workshop also examines race issues as they relate to prisons.

Our current projects include

> lobbying for a bill, sponsored by Representative Gloria Fox, regarding youth criminal records;

> seeking more forums for our workshop and using it as a tool for organizing;

> establishing a weekly van service which would shuttle friends and families of prisoners to and from prisons, and

> participating in Alternative to Violence workshops along with inmates.

We aim to strengthen our connections and relations with the communities most affected by the criminal justice system.
Being a member of HPAG!

The Harvard Progressive Advocacy Group undertakes really serious work—we want to be a reliable and accountable ally to the communities we work with. Because of this, we hope that you, as an HPAG member, take the commitments you make here seriously. We also want HPAG to be a fun and fulfilling community of people who are passionate about making change. All of our meetings, trainings, powerHOURs, and yes, parties, are aimed at creating a happy and healthy atmosphere in which we can be effective advocates as well as friends.

HPAG meets every Tuesday and Thursday night at 7pm at 45 Mt. Auburn Street. Tuesday nights will begin with an entire-group meeting, and will then move into meetings of issue groups. Thursday nights are for trainings and for getting work done! Much of the work you do with HPAG will be outside of meetings, away from the Harvard campus (because, of course, community-based political work happens in those communities).

Tuesday nights, we will all meet together at 7pm. Some weeks, we will use this time to get educated about what other issue groups and committees are doing, and figure out how we can support their work. Alternating Tuesdays, we will have “powerHOURs”—these are times for discussion and reflection, often facilitated by our community partners.

Thursday nights at 7pm, HPAG will meet for working groups or trainings. Working group time is for committee work (preparation for lobby work, writing op-eds, etc) as well as for issue groups to work on whatever they need to get done. Trainings will be sessions focused on developing the skills and understanding that we need to be effective in our advocacy efforts.

Every Sunday, Steercom will meet at 6.30pm (location to be determined). All members of HPAG are welcome at Steercom meetings, so don’t be shy!