

# 2009 Success Story: Harvard University

## Facts at a Glance

- The Harvard Crimson Football team competes at Harvard Stadium, with a capacity of 30,323.
- Harvard achieved a diversion rate of 57.999% during the 2009 Game Day Challenge.
- Harvard had the highest per capita recycling total from 2009, with 0.229 pounds recycled per person.
- Staff from the Office of Sustainability recruited student volunteers to collect and sort waste for recycling and composting.
- Student volunteers with colorful "Harvard Recycles" vests supplied recycling and trash bags to tailgaters. They were highly successful at getting the alumni and visitors to separate their bottles, cans and boxes for recycling.
- Harvard helped promote the event with a video featuring one of their football players talking about the benefits of recycling.

## Program Overview

Harvard represented the Ivy League in Game Day Challenge 2009 and was able to achieve the third highest diversion rate of all participants. Participating in the Game Day Recycling Challenge was a multi-party decision involving Athletics, the Office for Sustainability, Dining, Custodial, the Landscape contractor, Alumni Affairs, the Catering contractors, and Recycling & Waste Services. This group decided that trying to recover as much recycling as possible during Homecoming Weekend when hosting rival Princeton University would be a fun challenge. The Game Day Challenge was an opportunity for these diverse groups to work together towards a common goal.

Some Lessons Learned, from Rob Gogan of Harvard Facilities Maintenance Operations Recycling & Waste Services:

- Student volunteers with colorful vests supplied recycling and trash bags to tailgaters and were highly successful at getting the alumni and visitors to separate their bottles, cans and boxes for recycling.
- Food scraps are dense! We knew that before, but when we tried to pick up some double-lined bags of plate scrapings from Friday night's catered dinner, we discovered that bags alone were insufficient. Now we set out wheeled toters to collect food scraps from non-compostable china events
- Food scraps are not the only organics from dinners. The centerpieces at the dinner were seasonally themed, including pumpkins and a variety of squashes and gourds. These also were ultra-dense, and would definitely have been discarded as trash had we not had the Game Day Challenge.

One issue that Harvard had was the difficulty with consistently training clean-up staff and ensuring that recycling practices were implemented. They had good cooperation from the day custodians and landscapers, but the evening crews, who actually did the biggest share of the clean-up outside in the

dark, had not been adequately trained about separating recyclables from trash. Unfortunately, one crew member was seen throwing the recycling frames into the trash dumpster. Harvard learned from these issues and will address them in future recycling initiatives.

The Office for Sustainability staff put in a heroic effort to round up student volunteers, a key to the success of any university recycling initiative. After discovering that the second shift crews had been discarding a lot of the recyclables into the trash dumpster, a volunteer revealed that his date for that Saturday evening had been cancelled, so he didn't care how dirty his clothes got. He climbed in and started tossing out bags of sorted bottles, cans and flattened cardboard. By the time he was through, his clothes were in fact filthy, but the once half-full dumpster was only one quarter filled, and at least five cubic yards of recyclables were rescued.

Harvard tracks the amount of waste discarded at the university on a yearly basis, and has made admirable strides in reducing waste. Between September of 2004 and September of 2009, Harvard went from 831 tons to only 588 tons of waste discarded, a 29% reduction.<sup>1</sup>

Results from 2009 Game Day Challenge

<b>Category</b>	<b>2009 Result</b>
Diversion Rate (%)	57.99%
Per Capita Waste Generation (lbs/person)	0.39
Gross GHG Reductions (MTCO <sub>2</sub> E)	4
Per Capita Recycling (lbs/person)	0.229
Per Capita Composting (lbs/person)	0.05

1. [Harvard Recycling Newsletter; October 2009](#)