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Coalition for a Diverse Harvard Candidate Questionnaire

1. How important should diversity be at Harvard? What strategies should the University pursue to address diversity? (Please discuss specific programs and policies, including Ethnic Studies and faculty hiring, tenure, and advancement, if you can.)

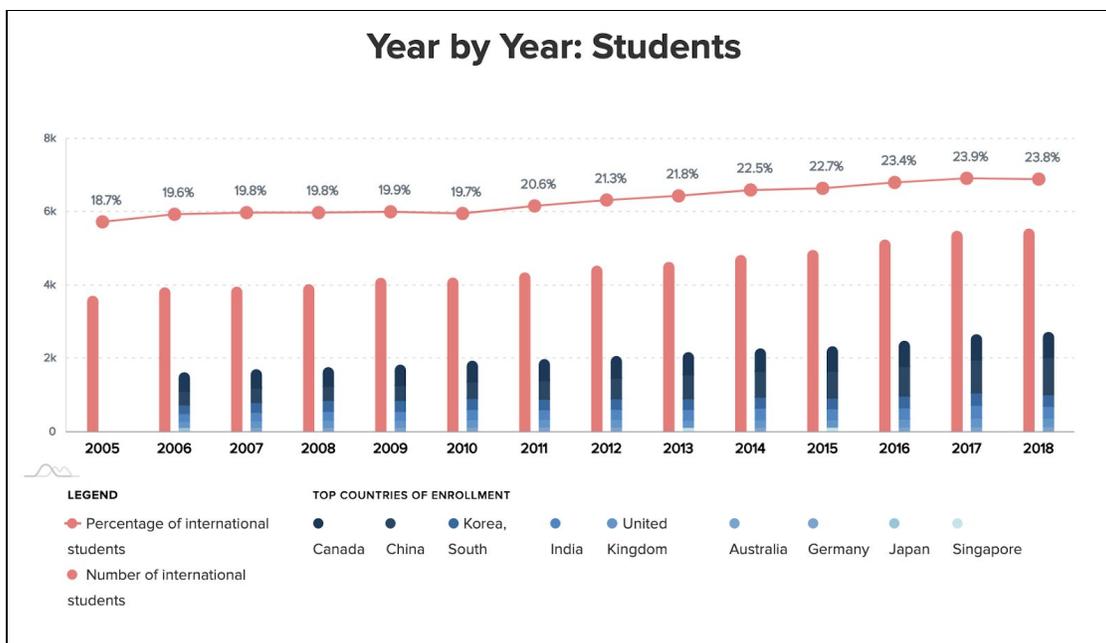
I believe that diversity ensures our strength as an intellectual community. My experience at Harvard is proof of that: I attended the Harvard Kennedy School as part of the Mason program, an exemplary initiative created 60 years ago to foster diversity and inclusion at HKS by bringing mid-career leaders from developing countries together to pursue MPAs. As a Mason fellow, I benefited from a vibrant environment, where my cohort members learned from each other and found common ground to address the world's most compelling development challenges. My colleagues came from incredibly diverse backgrounds: countries plagued by war, environments where climate change and pollution are already taking their toll, and even places where having certain sexual orientations is a crime punishable by death. My classmates' diverse lived experiences added a powerful dimension to the lessons we learned in the classroom: these weren't just theories in textbooks, but policies that were directly affecting the lives of people around the world. That experience has had a deep impact on my professional and personal trajectory, and I believe that all Harvard students should have similar opportunities to learn in an inclusive campus, where a diversity of cultures, races and ethnicities, genders, political and religious beliefs, physical and learning differences, sexual orientations, and opinions can coexist and thrive.

One specific way that Harvard can become more accessible to international students and to American students of color or from low-income backgrounds is by considering dropping standardized testing requirements from the College admissions process on a permanent basis, since these are often a barrier to prospective students who do not already have strong systems of support in place for their application process. In particular, I know it is very hard and confusing for international students to navigate the college application process, since the American process is so different from how it is almost everywhere else in the world. It is also usually more difficult to find a way to take the SAT or ACT abroad, with fewer available test dates and local test locations, especially if you don't live in a capital city or major hub.

Already, we have seen that removing that requirement this year, together with our strong financial aid program, has resulted in a record-high number of applications with 57,000 ([The](#)

[Crimson, 2021](#)). While the university may not have known what to expect when it waived standardized testing in college applications because of the pandemic, with two years of data on how the decision has impacted application demographics we should have a good sense of whether we should make the policy permanent for the sake of fostering even more diversity and inclusion through the admissions process. If necessary, we should provide the admissions office additional resources and funding to be able to adequately handle a higher load of applications each year.

As an international alumna, my perspective on diversity at Harvard is influenced by my global perspective. Harvard is a historic American institution with a unique relationship and special responsibilities to American populations, particularly to communities that have been historically marginalized in the US. At the same time, the university has become an increasingly international institution, with regard to both its international influence and its community makeup. The percentage of international students at the University has risen consistently over the past fifteen years, to the point that almost 25% of the entire student body across the university is international, coming from more than 200 countries. Furthermore, about 38% of faculty are also international ([Harvard, 2018](#)).



This increase in international perspectives means that there are more diverse perspectives on campus than ever before, but it also means that our conversations about Harvard becoming a more diverse and inclusive community – for students, for faculty, and for alumni – must also incorporate the perspectives and challenges of international students.

As a recent HKS grad who attended Harvard on an F-1 visa, and as someone with professional experience in Latin America, Europe, and Africa, I understand the struggles facing many in the international Harvard community right now and would strive to be a voice for them

on the Board of Overseers. Harvard has already proven its capability to be a strong advocate on the national stage for the value of international students: Harvard & MIT successfully sued the Trump administration in 2020 to rescind a new policy blocking international students ([The New York Times, 2020](#)). As one of the most powerful forces in American higher education, Harvard has the ability to continue advocating for international collaboration and openness in education and research, which benefits us all.

Advancing a diverse, equitable, and inclusive future at Harvard goes beyond just who Harvard brings onto its campus as students. One immediate priority is actualizing diversity in what Harvard teaches as well as in who it hires as faculty and staff. One critical, highly needed example of this is the creation of an Ethnic Studies department. For decades, community members have advocated for an Ethnic Studies department, but Harvard has been slow to respond. While steps are finally being taken, in large part thanks to the ongoing organizing of groups like the Ethnic Studies Coalition and the Coalition for a Diverse Harvard, the fact that it has taken Harvard so long to reach this point reflects a failure on the university's part to prioritize expanding institutional diversity and inclusion through its curricular offerings and faculty appointments ([The Crimson, 2017](#)). I support the creation of an Ethnic Studies Department as a means to provide structures and resources to support Ethnic Studies research, teaching, and community building. Having grown up in Latin America, I believe that this would significantly elevate research and scholarship on identity and power, departing from predominantly Eurocentric perspectives.

It is Harvard's responsibility to make principled decisions regarding what it chooses to teach; how it chooses to teach it; and whom it selects to teach and to be taught. These decisions must be made with diversity as a guiding principle in line with a vision of equity, inclusiveness, and fairness, and I will make that a top priority in my role as a board member.

2. Please state your views on affirmative action and race-conscious admissions.

Our current societies were built on the efforts of populations that have been historically denied access to and benefits from higher education. In light of that, I believe that considering race as a factor in admissions is a vital mechanism for Harvard's pursuit of both excellence and diversity, and affirmative action is a key element in advancing equity and inclusiveness, providing some measure of redress for discrimination and implicit bias at Harvard and in the world more broadly.

For example, in my home country of Brazil, affirmative action for Indigenous, Black and low-income students has enabled and enacted important changes, including increasing the number of first-generation students in higher education, with a significant positive impact for the students themselves and for our society at large. But access to opportunity needs to be complemented with a sense of belonging. We need to ensure that students who would enrich the

Harvard community by bringing diverse perspectives and life experiences to campus are not just admitted, but also well-supported throughout the length of their programs at the university so that they can truly thrive and get the most out of their education at Harvard.

In order to do that, we must do everything we can to fight against cases of racism and exclusion on our campus. As a starting point, I fully support the calls to rename the Board of Overseers given the word's connotation in the history of slavery in the United States. Being an international member of the Harvard community, I was not aware of this connotation until recently, but in conversations with my fellow Harvard Forward candidates and the many alumni supporting our candidacies, it has become clear to me that this is a simple but important step Harvard can take to signal that it is continuously working to make the university a more inclusive place for students of all backgrounds. As a board member, I will similarly always be willing to listen to those with different lived experiences from mine to strive to be the best possible ally to students, faculty, staff, and alumni who want to make Harvard a more welcoming and equitable place.

Finally, I believe that in order for all students to feel at home at Harvard we also must do what we can to combat systemic injustices *beyond* our campus. During my time at the Kennedy School, for instance, I organized a campaign to denounce horrific cases of violence and systemic racism against Indigenous students taking place in Brazil: an Indigenous baby was killed by a stranger while in his mother's lap, and an Indigenous student at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul was brutally beaten in reaction to his admission to the University under the system of inclusive quotas of Indigenous peoples. The Harvard community spoke out against the violence by publishing a [Letter of Solidarity](#), and students used the privilege of their Harvard status to elevate the voices of Indigenous students far away ([HKS Review, 2016](#)). It was a beautiful moment of solidarity and cooperation against discrimination and in defense of diversity and inclusivity ([SBT, 2016](#); [Conexão Planeta, 2016](#)).

3. What do you think Harvard's role should be in creating a more equitable, inclusive, and just society? For example, please share any thoughts on divestment from fossil fuels and the prison industry and on the role of the Harvard University Police Department, issues of concern to current students.

Creating a more equitable, inclusive, and just society requires bold moral leadership from Harvard. It is not only about the community on campus, but also about the societies we want to see thrive around the world. The global community expects Harvard to leverage its significant resources and influence to help solve complex global problems both by supporting top-level research and by preparing our graduates from every school to tackle the challenges facing our societies once they leave campus.

Harvard can do this, first, by recognizing that this decade is absolutely critical to climate action. These next 10 years will define whether we will collectively stabilize the planet's temperature or if humanity will endure harsh decades and centuries of global warming ahead ([IPCC, 2018](#)). The time for exercising climate leadership is *now*, and the members of the Board during these coming years will bear the responsibility for steering Harvard in this journey.

In that regard, halting and reversing tropical deforestation is a key immediate step required to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement, as it accounts for approximately 15% of global greenhouse gas emissions ([IPCC, 2018](#)). As a Harvard alumna, it came as a shock to me learning that Harvard's endowment was deeply and directly invested in farmland acquisitions steeped in illegal deforestation and violent expulsion of small-scale farmers from their homes in Brazil ([Mongabay, 2018](#); [Mongabay, 2020](#)). Those investments resulted in both financial and reputational damage to Harvard while contributing to social injustices and climate change ([Bloomberg, 2018](#); [Bloomberg, 2019](#)).

I believe that the University should be intentional on this front: despite years of student and faculty urging Harvard to remove investments from the major carbon-emitting sectors (fossil fuels and deforestation), the University has not yet sent a crystal-clear signal that it understands the 'urgency of now' to tackle the climate emergency, nor has it presented a particularly bold strategy to address the challenges we face ([The Nation, 2012](#); [Time Magazine, 2015](#); [The Harvard Crimson, 2020](#); [Divest Harvard, 2020](#); [Grist, 2020](#)). There has been a lack of transparency regarding why Harvard has not yet fully aligned its strategy with the goals of the Paris Agreement, including through its \$41.9 Billion endowment fund. A space for dialogue in the Harvard community about disclosure, divestment, and reinvestment is missing. By refraining from taking bold and urgent steps, Harvard is slowing down the race to zero emissions and climate resilience that the world so desperately needs.

The second way Harvard can contribute to a more inclusive economy and just society through its endowment is by divesting from companies that profit from prisons, and reinvesting those resources into activities and sectors that contribute to a fairer and more sustainable future. The push from students, alumni, and faculty to create an endowment that is more transparent and aligned with our values is a significant one because it reflects an understanding of the real and symbolic power of money: as long as Harvard is profiting from caging humans, the rest of Harvard's actions on social justice will feel hollow. Harvard community members are looking for moral leadership from Harvard; the Board of Overseers, through its power to approve or reject new members of the Corporation, has the power to contribute to shaping our investment strategies in a way that lines up with the university's ideals. With my extensive background in socially-responsible and sustainable finance, I am well positioned to advise the board on how to commit ourselves to move in that direction.

Similarly, Harvard must do everything possible to ensure that the way it spends money on campus also upholds the values of the institution. For example, there's no reason that with our

endowment, the Graduate School of Education should be forced to pause PhD admissions for a year because of a budget shortfall ([The Crimson, 2020](#)). And I'm ready to work with and listen to student and community members to ensure that the university takes concrete steps to address the serious and well-documented issues in the Harvard University Police Department and ensure that other systems of support for students, such as mental health resources, are appropriately funded so that our community can truly be safe and inclusive ([The Crimson, 2020](#)).

All of this is connected to what Harvard does best, which is research and education. We can demonstrate our complete commitment to fighting for climate and racial justice through our investments, by divesting from fossil fuels, deforestation, and the prison-industrial complex, and through our educational programs, by increasing support for climate-focused research and education and by establishing and supporting an Ethnic Studies department and concentration.

4. What steps have you taken to bring diversity and inclusion to Harvard, to your workplace, and/or to an organization that you have been involved with?

I have consistently championed efforts that value and support diversity and inclusion, as well as efforts that support and empower historically marginalized communities, throughout my career and outside my work.

Environmental justice has always been at the core of my professional work as a climate policy expert, with a particular focus on supporting and protecting Indigenous peoples in the Amazon rainforest, many of whom I've had the privilege of working with directly for several years. Through that work, I have seen up close how discrimination and other institutional barriers hinder access to education, worsen health outcomes, and affect other opportunities, which is why I have always aimed to leverage my privilege to advocate for the most vulnerable populations in Brazil and around the world.

When I served as a climate negotiator at the UN on behalf of Brazil, I had the opportunity to help marshal the international community to honor Indigenous peoples' demands for both economic opportunities and environmental protections ([CIFOR, 2012](#); [BBC, 2013](#)). These safeguards have become touchstones in the field of climate policy and are widely credited with shifting the negotiations on how Indigenous peoples' priorities are considered in the international climate arena. I also currently serve on the Accreditation Panel of the United Nations' Green Climate Fund, which is the world's largest financial mechanism to advance climate investments. In that role, I am responsible for ensuring that social, environmental, and gender equity safeguards are respected by all of the world's institutions that are making use of the fund's resources.

At Harvard, I co-founded the HKS Climate Justice Caucus in Spring 2016, centered around considerations of the human rights implications of climate change and the ethical

dilemmas around who will pay to slow the pace of climate change. I see it as a humble but important step, as it was the first group of its kind created within HKS. The very concept of climate justice begins with recognizing key groups are differently affected by climate change: low-income communities, people of color, Indigenous people, people with disabilities, older or very young people, and women will disproportionately bear the impacts.

The story we are told is that science and technology will solve the climate emergency if technical solutions are sufficiently and adequately supported by leaders who believe in evidence-based decisions. But I don't believe that politics, science, and tech will produce different outcomes from the current ones if those in charge are the same groups of people who led us into these issues. It is my view that, to make real progress, we need a new, diverse, and inclusive style of leadership that will lead to truly just outcomes.

Outside of work, I have been an advocate for women's participation in politics and science. Despite a global rising trend in the number of women leading in business, governments, and academia, the gender gap remains a large issue. In 2018, I embarked on a mission to review more than 600 scientific papers and identify the barriers to leadership faced by women in STEMM ([Western Sydney University, 2019](#)). I contributed to the documentation and study of systemic gender inequality, making the case for strategic interventions ([Homeward Bound, 2019](#)). An example of a systemic intervention is Homeward Bound (HB), a global leadership initiative I am part of for women with a background in STEMM fields. Homeward Bound aims to bring 1,000 women from around the world into STEMM leadership for the benefit of the planet within a decade.

5. If elected, would you be willing to meet occasionally with the leaders and/or memberships of the groups below during your tenure?

Yes. I recognize that my experience at Harvard only represents a narrow window into the total Harvard experience, and in order to effectively serve the entire university as a board member I need to always be willing to hear from alumni and student leaders about the concerns of the Harvard community.

In fact, one of the reasons I am running for the board as a Harvard Forward candidate is because I believe strongly that Harvard's governance can not only be more transparent but would also benefit greatly from it. On top of being willing to meet with the leaders of the groups that make up the Coalition myself, I hope to use my background in governance best practices to be able to make the board more accessible to Harvard community members by implementing new avenues for input such as town hall meetings that will bring the administration and the community closer together.