

## **Juan Sepúlveda—Coalition for a Diverse Harvard Questionnaire—February 13, 2024**

- 1. How important should diversity, equity, and inclusion be at Harvard, and what strategies should the University pursue to address these? Please discuss specific programs and policies regarding, for example: Ethnic Studies; faculty hiring, tenure, and advancement; the 1650 Charter's pledge to facilitate education of American Indian youth; Harvard's legacy of slavery; environmental justice measures; etc.*

A key part of Harvard's mission has been to help produce diverse, global citizen leaders who go on to have impact in their communities and the world. To accomplish this mission, diversity, equity, belonging, and intentional inclusion need to be at the core of who we are.

For Harvard, this should mean embracing a broad, modern-day interpretation of intentional inclusion that includes everyone connected to the university – all students, staff, faculty, alumni, and the greater Cambridge community – while being respectful of both group and individual differences.

This modern approach to diversity, equity, belonging, and intentional inclusion is not “either-or,” but “both-and.” It encompasses race, ethnicity, class, religion, gender, sexual orientation, immigration status, geographic origin, nationality, veteran status, age, abilities, and viewpoints. And it recognizes individual differences as well. All of these elements should be factors for consideration, along with a student's academic record and leadership potential, as we strive to become even better at bringing together a global student body that more accurately reflects the demographics of our country and the world as a whole.

To deepen their sense of belonging, students need to see themselves reflected on campus – in the students, faculty, staff, and administration at Harvard, and in the curriculum -- as though looking at a mirror.

But to broaden their social networks as well as their capacity to lead diverse teams in the future, they also need to expand their horizons and experiences by connecting with others who are different from them; they need to look outside their windows.

Harvard Crimson community members come from all backgrounds, each of us has a unique life experience, and we draw strength from our differences. We must create a greater sense of belonging for all. It is imperative that we build a culture that is welcoming and supportive of everyone on campus. We need to encourage our students to step off campus and connect to the broader Cambridge, state, national, and global communities. And we must foster a thriving community for everyone, where each individual is valued, heard, and seen and is fully engaged with all Harvard has to offer.

Historically, Harvard has a responsibility both to the American Indian and African-American communities to better serve more of its community members and to increase their numbers on campus.

We do all this together by studying, working, playing, living, connecting, and building relationships, especially with people who are different from us.

I came to Cambridge as an underdog—a first generation, low-income, working class Mexican American from Topeka, Kansas. Harvard opened up a big world to me. Harvard helped me gain my own version of the American Dream because of their deep belief in a diverse student body. I'm dedicated to ensuring that Harvard remains a place where underdogs, irrespective of their background, can thrive.

2. *Given the Supreme Court's ruling against race-conscious admissions, what measures should the University adopt to promote student-body diversity along multiple dimensions, including racial diversity?*

While many of us expected the Supreme Court to rule against race-conscious admissions, we were somewhat surprised at the narrow interpretation they put forward. In short, many legal scholars and university admissions officers read the Court's opinion to narrowly disallow the consideration of race when making admissions decisions, but it did not outlaw the consideration of race in all the other steps in the admissions process prior to and after admissions decisions have been made.

From this perspective, there are many different measures or approaches Harvard can continue to use to promote student-body diversity along multiple dimensions. Most of these strategies are ones Harvard already pursues, but we should commit to strengthening and expanding these approaches.

For example, to increase the diversity of our applicant pool, we can expand our outreach and recruitment efforts, collaborate with more community organizations that serve underrepresented communities, strengthen our pipeline programs, and have Harvard students and alumni pull back the curtain on the Harvard admissions process for targeted underrepresented student populations and help those students and families better understand the system (Harvard Admissions 101).

We can place a larger emphasis on socioeconomic-based admissions, in short, elevating class as a key factor, in the Harvard admissions process. This can be done by looking more closely at family income, neighborhood and community environments, or access (or lack of access) to educational resources in schools and outside schools.

This can coincide with Harvard's ongoing holistic admissions review process that has been cited by the Court in the past as a positive way to consider multiple factors, including race, as a way to keep a student's background, experiences, identity, resilience, and grit in the mix when considering whom to admit.

And it's not just about admitting a more diverse student body, we also need to make sure we retain these students and offer them a powerful, positive educational experience where they feel they truly belong at Harvard. This can be achieved by parallel goals, such as increasing the diversity of the staff, faculty, and administration leadership on campus and offering support programs for all our students.

Finally, because we want to strive for always being better, we need to make sure we are capturing data, evaluating our experiments, researching what others are doing in the field, and holding ourselves accountable for what we are doing. We can then expand and scale our proven initiatives and end, learn, and adapt from our pilot projects that are not successful.

In a world that is changing faster every day, Harvard faces the imperative of evolving alongside these changes. While we are extremely proud of our global brand, we shouldn't rest on our past achievements. Rather, we must continually strive to excel, embracing flexibility, adaptability, and a willingness to take risks.

3. *Do you support the elimination of admissions preferences for recruited athletes, children of donors, and children of alumni (legacy)? Please address all three categories.*

The question of whether to eliminate admissions preferences for recruited athletes, children of donors, and children of alumni (legacies) from the Harvard admissions process should ultimately depend on Harvard's institutional goals and values, mission and vision, and its commitment to fairness, diversity, and academic excellence.

With Harvard's clear mission to help produce diverse, global citizen leaders who go on to have impact in their communities and the world, eliminating these admissions preferences could help level the admissions playing field, promote greater equity in the process, and would align Harvard's admissions process more closely to the ideals of meritocracy and equal opportunity for all.

I understand that the current Harvard admissions process is a subjective process, but by ending these preferences, the end result would be a system more focused on the merits, where potential leadership contributions to Harvard, a student's community, and the broader world would be more important than whether your family is wealthy, has connections, or has sent generations of family members to Harvard.

At the same time, I am open to a more nuanced approach to these preferences if they can help strengthen Harvard's goal of creating a more diverse set of global citizen leaders. For example, perhaps the preferences could be more targeted. Instead of a blanket preference for recruited athletes, a preference could be given to underrepresented student athletes, in essence, giving those applicants another plus in their admissions profile. The same approach could be used for children of alumni from underrepresented categories. I think it would be more difficult to give any preference for children of donors because of the lingering perception that certain families can buy their way into Harvard. These targeted use of preferences for recruited athletes and children of alumni from underrepresented groups would allow Harvard to move closer to its overall mission.

4. *In light of recent turmoil—from the doxxing of students to the resignation of President Gay—how do you think Harvard can ensure key institutional values such as: academic independence from political and financial strong-arming; free expression on campus (including the right to protest); and safety for all?*

There are a number of actions Harvard can take to uphold key institutional values such as academic independence from political and financial strong-arming, free expression (including the right to protest), and campus safety for all.

We can publicly and frequently reaffirm Harvard's institutional values by issuing statements through our full set of official communication channels.

We can promote civil discourse, dialogue, free expression, constructive engagement, and peaceful protest campus wide. The key here is to recognize that these are skills that need to be taught and experienced by our students. We cannot assume that they know how to successfully do this on their own. Providing forums is not enough, we need to be sharing strategies and approaches on how best to do this work.

We can provide ongoing education and training on the rights and responsibilities for all Harvard community members related to all these issue areas so that everyone is better aware of their rights and obligations.

We can take care of one another by offering more support and resources for everyone impacted by these tumultuous times through counseling and mental health services, legal assistance, if needed, and other support services.

We can do a comprehensive review of our university policies to see what is missing, what needs to be strengthened, what needs to be changed, what needs to be ended, to ensure we are doing all we can to uphold our institutional values related to all these areas.

We can engage with our stakeholders, both internally, with our students, staff, and faculty, and externally, with community organizations, local authorities, alumni networks, and other similarly situated higher education institutions, to build partnerships, get feedback, and support for what we should do on all these issue fronts.

We can enhance campus wide security measures that ensures the increased safety of all Harvard community members.

And we can do better at providing transparency and holding ourselves accountable as we tackle all these complex issues on campus in the hope of building trust and confidence in Harvard's commitment to upholding its core principles related to all these areas.

*5. What steps have you taken to bring diversity and inclusion to Harvard, to your workplace, and/or to other organizations? Are you a member of any of the signing groups below?*

I have been fortunate to have spent a great deal of my life working on diversity, belonging, and intentional inclusion in my day jobs and community work. From my days at Harvard where I worked for the Admissions Office and did minority recruiting for underrepresented groups, especially in the Latino community, and was a four-year member of our Harvard Raza student organization, including serving as a co-leader in my last few years, to the decades long work I did as an alumni admissions interviewer for Harvard, including leading our schools and admissions efforts for the Harvard Club of San Antonio, I have continued to help Harvard achieve its goal of producing a diverse set of global leaders.

Most recently, I have been serving as the President's Special Advisor for Inclusive Excellence at Trinity University, helping establish our first office of diversity, equity, belonging and inclusion. I helped organize and convene a new cross-campus Inclusive Excellence Advisory Council, a campus-wide group of 70 members, consisting of students, staff, and faculty, charged with helping develop strategy and taking action related to our Inclusive Excellence efforts. I created Trinity's first Latino leadership development class, aimed at building community, developing leadership skills, and fostering a deeper sense of belonging to the Trinity University community.

I created and led the inaugural *Dream Lead Institute*, a national year-long leadership development program aimed at young professional Dreamers (undocumented individuals between 20 and 35 years of age) who are leaders in their communities, organizations, and sectors who want to help positively move forward the Dreamer community and America by strengthening their skills, relationships, and knowledge as part of a national network of Dreamer leaders. I partnered with the Hispanic Heritage Foundation in this initiative.

I created and led the LOFT (Latinos on the Fast Track) Leadership Institute in partnership with the Hispanic Heritage Foundation, a leadership development program for the top Latino high school students in the country focusing on building community and social capital by connecting the Fellows to one another – a national peer network, professional networking, introducing the Fellows more deeply to their sector and innovation. More than 32,000 Latino high school students applied for the Hispanic Heritage Foundation's Youth Awards program – 300 winners were selected across ten sectors.

At PBS, I led the system's diversity, equity, and inclusion work including producing the first ever comprehensive PBS system diversity and inclusion audit (staff, boards, general managers, and key senior

staff positions), shared the baseline information throughout the system, facilitated national public media conversations on diversity, equity, and inclusion through our 8 Regional Network meetings, and held a National Action Summit with more than 20 local member stations serving as a national advisory and working group crafting diversity, equity, and inclusion plans.

In the Obama Administration, I designed and facilitated the first-ever White House Hispanic Policy Conference. Co-sponsored by the White House Office of Public Engagement, 160 Hispanic leaders from 25 states, D.C. and Puerto Rico joined over 100 Administration officials over two days to discuss the President's agenda and its impact on the Hispanic community and more importantly, to strategize together on how to best move forward together to improve outcomes and access for the Hispanic community.

Building on the success of the White House Hispanic Policy Conference, I created a series of White House Hispanic Community Action Summits--day-long Open Space Process gatherings held across the country where representatives of White House offices and federal agencies worked together with Latino community leaders: developing their own agendas, establishing relationships, sharing information, and building public-private partnerships to tackle key community issues. Twenty (20) summits were held in the following states: AZ; CA; CO; FL; MD; NC; NM; NV; NY; OH; PA; TX; VA and WI.

*6. What role do you think Harvard can and should play in defending democracy in the US and around the world?*

As one of the leading academic institutions in the world, which possesses significant influence and resources, Harvard is strongly situated to help defend democracy in the U.S. and globally.

From a collective impact perspective, Harvard can and should play a role in defending democracy at home and abroad from its lane of higher education. We are already doing a lot of this work, but we can always do more and strive to get better at what we offer.

We can continue to provide leadership in the research and scholarship arenas by producing high-quality academic work in all the fields related to democracy and sharing these evidence-based works outside the academy with the public sector, policymakers, civil society organizations, and the general public, and offer action recommendations to help strengthen democracy.

We can keep offering education and training opportunities to different democracy stakeholders, including our students, but also to external groups who are in the midst of doing democracy work on a day-to-day basis. I think of the amazing closed-door gatherings we have done for decades for newly-elected congressmen, governors, mayors, and other elected officials from the U.S. and other countries, and for policymakers, practitioners, political campaign staff, and nongovernmental leaders working in the democracy realm.

We can deepen and expand the international partnerships and collaborations we have with other U.S. and global higher education institutions, think tanks, public sector organizations, governments, philanthropy, and civil society and nongovernmental groups to promote democracy, democratic governance, and strengthen democratic institutions worldwide.

We can assist and support frontline democratic efforts led by grassroots movements, community organizers, voter registration and education organizations, and civil society groups who are working directly with communities across the globe. This includes capacity-building and leadership development programs.

We can lead by example by promoting more democratic values, practices, and policies on campus and fostering a democratic culture of campus free expression and dialogue and making sure the democratic principles of transparency, accountability, and intentional inclusion are prominent in all we do.

And finally, while we are extremely proud of our global brand and all we have already accomplished, we shouldn't rest on our past achievements. Rather, we must continually strive to excel, embracing flexibility, adaptability, and a willingness to take risks. By fostering an environment that encourages innovation and risk-taking, Harvard can do even more to strengthen democracy at home and abroad while always remembering that we cannot do it alone.

A key part of Harvard's mission has been to help produce diverse, global citizen leaders who go on to have impact in their communities and the world. As Harvard grapples with the Supreme Courts' recent decision and as societal shifts demand a nuanced approach to diversity, Harvard can stay true to its values of creating a diverse community of global citizen leaders and take the lead on redefining diversity and fostering a sense of belonging for all students. "Communities that welcome diverse perspectives thrive not because they endorse all as valid but because they question all on their merits," President Gay stated. After all, it's our people, that make Harvard special.

My ongoing commitment to expanding access and connection to underrepresented groups within the Harvard community aligns with the university's goals of producing diverse global citizen leaders who will have an impact on their communities and the world. As an Overseer, I can actively contribute to assisting our schools and departments in fostering a deeper sense of belonging for all students, ensuring that Harvard remains a beacon of educational excellence and inclusivity.

Where else could a low-income, working class, first-generation Mexican-American kid from Topeka, Kansas have the chance to chase his American Dream?