

Rebecca Chamian Ribaudo
Coalition for a Diverse Harvard Questionnaire February 2021

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.)

Diversity of perspectives and freedom of speech should be of vital importance to Harvard. Rigorous support for rational inquiry and open exchange with opposing viewpoints, inclusion of diverse ideas, and defense of intellectual freedom are essential to the search for truth and attainment of knowledge. Such diversity is also a precondition for the tolerance, understanding and respect required for members of a pluralistic society to co-exist peacefully and operate in a democratic republic.

As Alexander Solzhenitsyn warned Harvard in his 1978 commencement address, “fashionable trends of thought” in the media and academia work as a “petrified armor around people’s minds” that “will be broken only by the pitiless crowbar of events.” Harvard must be a bulwark against conformity of thought and ideologies that command the allegiance of its students, faculty and alumni.

To this end, ideological diversity among faculty is a vital protection that should be considered in hiring, promotion and new department considerations. Diversity in teachings, including that of visiting speakers, is also a protection against the blindness of superiority that can come from excluding challenging ideas.

Harvard’s admissions process should help ensure that Harvard is attracting and admitting students not only from diverse demographics but also with diverse perspectives, including religious and political.

Lastly, fostering an open, tolerant climate in which students and faculty feel free to explore and express minority or contrarian viewpoints without fear of retribution or marginalization should be included in the University’s diversity and inclusion goals.

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

I support an admissions process that helps ensure that a broad range of perspectives are represented on campus. Transparency regarding the process, including measurable goals and data on results, would instill more confidence in methodological integrity.

In terms of supporting opportunity and access, socioeconomics is a key factor. While admissions are need-blind with financial aid considered separately, if diversity and inclusion are goals, admissions cannot be “blind” to the pivotal intersection of socioeconomics with other factors when considering candidates.

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.

As one of the world’s most recognized and economically powerful academic institutions, Harvard has the opportunity to change the trajectory of America’s educationally impoverished youth. Our nation’s most vulnerable students are failed in the earliest of years, with chances for

higher education destroyed as early as grade school. If Harvard is sincere about diversity, inclusion and access, it has a responsibility to get involved in education at the point of possibility. Modeling or working with already successful platforms, Harvard can partner with schools across the country in support of teachers to develop and/or deliver foundational education and community-based educational support. Bold leadership efforts will be especially important as school closings and adjustments due to Covid have disproportionately impacted our most educationally vulnerable, creating learning losses that Harvard and other institutions simply will not be able to address with admissions processes.

I am also in support of a holistic review of Harvard's partnerships, investments and funding, including that of its faculty. To this end, divestment/investment considerations must be a part of a larger conversation about social responsibility across the University. The role of governments implicated in human rights violations, forced labor camps, and genocide cannot be divorced from the dialogue. Governments with economies based on fossil fuel exports contribute significantly to Harvard while governments with economies growing due to outsized fossil fuel consumption contribute to and partner with Harvard and its faculty, at times via programs that may pose a risk to our military and national security.

Lastly, I am a mother whose teenage daughter was a victim of physical violence in Chicago. In this, I am not alone. Nor am I alone in my strong belief that violence on America's streets won't be reduced by abolishing or defunding police, whether HUPD or BPD. There are issues with policing that need to be addressed, including policies and strategies related to managing mental health crises, deescalation, and cultures of strict accountability. Leaving our children, university students and neighbors, especially those in our most vulnerable and violence-stricken communities, to fend for themselves is not the solution.

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 been a Harvard Club of Chicago liaison for one of Chicago's largest public high schools for more than a decade, developing and holding online interviewing workshops, interviewing students, delivering the Harvard book prize, and striving to make Harvard more accessible to Chicago's public school students, many of whom are first generation students from low-income communities.

As an early director of Harvard Alumni for Global Women's Empowerment, I was part of the team that helped to build our HAA SIG and expand to nearly 1,000 members globally with more than 2,000 participating in our programs. Harvard GlobalWE holds online events on topics such as "The Impact of Mass Incarceration on Women Worldwide," "Shifting Paradigms for Girls & Women through Education in Emerging Economies," and "Global Perspectives on Sexual Violence." I served on the group's executive board for seven years and have been on the advisory board since 2020.

In Chicago, I served on the board of the XS Tennis and Education Foundation (XSTEF), helping to articulate the vision and develop support for an athletic and academic center for underserved youth on Chicago's South Side. Completed in 2017, XSTEF is a 150,000-square-foot tennis and educational center located on the former site of the Robert Taylor Homes. The center provides a safe haven for local youth and a resource for the children, teens and adults of the community.

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

Yes.