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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 regarding this? (Please discuss specific programs and policies, including Ethnic Studies and faculty hiring, tenure, and advancement, if you can.)*

Harvard's success as an institution in the 21st century will be largely contingent on its ability to respond to the needs and concerns of its students and faculty, who are proportionately more diverse now than they have ever been, although we still have much room for improvement. Given that Harvard has a long history of systematically excluding people based on gender, race, social class, sexual orientation, and religion, it's absolutely crucial for Harvard to make defending and promoting diversity a top priority today in order for its students, faculty, and alumni to feel truly welcome in the community.

For example, students from over 150 countries come to Harvard to share their unique perspectives and learn from each other, and yet many of them feel that their experiences are undervalued as topics of study because we do not have a dedicated Ethnic Studies department. For years, students, faculty, alumni, and staff have expressed a strong desire for the formation of such a department, and Harvard's commitment to diversity is incomplete without one. As an alum and recent student, [I support the creation of an Ethnic Studies department](#), and as an Overseer I will advocate to make it a reality.

Faculty at Harvard inspire students to go forward and change the world, and their mentorship of students forms the bedrock of the University. However, in order for the faculty to meet the needs of our student body, it needs to reflect the lived experiences of our students. As long as the [diversity of the faculty lags behind that of the student body](#), many students will not be able to identify with any of their teachers during their time at Harvard. During my master's program at the Chan School of Public Health, all of my professors and instructors were white. If we aim to offer the highest quality education, our students should have the opportunity to learn from a talented, accomplished, and diverse group of individuals, which is why Harvard should implement measures to create equitable hiring processes to improve the share of faculty (tenure and non-tenure) that come from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds.

In fact, when I sat on the HSPH student government, we proposed creating a shared governance structure whereby students would offer input in key deliberations around faculty hiring, academic policies, and program curricula. Viewing the diversity of our students as an asset would make the University more informed in its decision-making processes.

We **need** this type of diversity to maintain academic excellence because public health issues disproportionately impact marginalized communities, and those intersections are often overlooked and under-researched. Having more diverse faculty members will ensure we eliminate many blind spots in our academic work, which will improve the quality of both our research and education.

***2. How can Harvard encourage more diversity among its alumni leaders and activities? (If not discussed above.)***

Harvard's vibrant and active alumni network presents ample opportunities for encouraging and promoting diversity in our community. While there are many volunteer, appointed, and elected leadership opportunities that exist under the HAA umbrella (SIGs, regional clubs, and HAA itself) many of these positions may be inaccessible to subsets of the alumni population, leading to overrepresentation of certain groups or individuals – on average older, whiter, and better connected. For example, while attending HAA and alumni club events this year, I've rarely come across other recent black alumni.

To combat this issue, HAA needs to make wide ranging outreach to all alumni, regardless of their personal networks, professional achievements, or ability to donate. Intentional outreach can help involvement among alumni from all social, age, ethnic, and class groups.

Additionally, the [Harvard Forward platform](#) proposes incorporating recent graduates directly into Harvard's highest levels of governance, where they will be able to provide valuable insights as to how the University and HAA can better engage with younger alumni. The same principles can be applied to other alumni organizations to build a pipeline of diverse leadership for the future, since recent alumni are statistically more diverse than previous classes.

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

It's incredibly important for Harvard's student body to reflect different lived experiences and represent different communities, as zip codes are unfortunately still strong predictors of access to educational opportunity in the US. Coming from an African-American, single-parent, and lower-income home in the south, I was presented with a variety of challenges that impacted my path to higher education. From racism in the classroom to stereotypes about my intelligence, it was an uphill battle to make my way into advanced classes. Because of the costs, I never had the option for SAT or ACT test prep and struggled to afford to take the test itself. These challenges were all beyond my control, and as a result I feel very strongly that our admissions processes must consider race and other related factors in order to make the most fully informed decisions about which prospective students would contribute most to our campus community in their own ways.

Affirmative action and race-conscious admissions help create a more equitable and level playing field for prospective students, and their implementation acknowledges the value of bringing people from different communities together to learn from each other. In college and grad school, I learned as much from my classes as from my classmates, precisely because they all had unique views and perspectives that challenged me to grow. I will defend our admissions practices as long as they seek to foster the diversity that allows students to learn from each other.

#### ***4. What do you think Harvard's role should be in creating a more equitable, inclusive and just society?***

Harvard is an internationally respected leader with global influence – other institutions and organizations look to Harvard for guidance, and people equate Harvard with excellence and credibility. This privileged position comes with the responsibility to use our influence for the creation of a more equitable, inclusive, and just world.

To think about Harvard's relationship to advancing social justice, we have to consider Harvard's relationship to marginalized communities. Harvard cannot successfully support marginalized communities unless people from those communities are the ones leading the way. This is part of why having more diverse students, faculty, and staff is so important. But Harvard also cannot successfully engage in this work unless legacies of harm are addressed and current harmful practices are stopped.

Communities of color frequently bear the brunt of decisions made by people in power, and one of the most pressing issues of our time is climate change, which disproportionately impacts communities of color and other vulnerable populations. Marginalized peoples are the first to feel the adverse effects of a changing climate, and for them, the climate crisis is already happening and has very real and very human consequences: loss of life in increasingly frequent natural disasters, towns that aren't equipped to deal with rising sea levels, severe health complications from exposure to pollutants, lengthy droughts forcing migration.

The fact that Harvard is not mobilizing every resource at its disposal and utilizing every ounce of influence it has to be a leader in the fight against climate change shows how removed Harvard is from these communities that are suffering. The fact that Harvard is actively profiting from the fossil fuel industry that is perpetuating this harm is morally reprehensible.

Divesting from fossil fuels, investing in greater climate research and education initiatives, and leveraging its influence to mobilize others to action as well are all ways that Harvard can work to make the world more just. Minimizing the impacts of climate change improves the health, wellbeing, and financial status of people around the world, particularly marginalized peoples. As a public health practitioner, I have been involved in research and initiatives with the goal of improving individual wellbeing through systemic change. This type of change typically requires a higher investment of time and money, and a great deal of coalition building. In the long term though, systemic change has greater lasting effects and makes the world a more equitable place, which is a pretty solid return on investment. This is the type of change I would like to see Harvard play a role in.

***5. 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've always worked to create an inclusive and welcoming environment in the organizations that I'm a part of. These environments rarely occur naturally; we have to actively seek out ways to develop them. This requires talking to and working with different community members to ensure that their voices are heard and their needs are met. One way I've approached this issue is by being very intentional about designing opportunities participation that interest a broad range of individuals.

While at Harvard, I served in multiple leadership positions within the HSPH student government. Working with other members of the team, we solicited input and analyzed the experience of American and international students as both applicants and students. The results of the survey led to concrete changes to reduce barriers to entry, such as the addition of further financial aid information online and the creation of toll-free information lines, and to foster a greater sense of community, such as international-focused dinners.

In another initiative, we created a multicultural task force to study the prospect of establishing a campus-wide multicultural center, bringing together students, staff, and faculty at HSPH and other schools. Additionally, we assessed the financial needs of HSPH students and found that a significant proportion were food insecure, leading students to skip meals, sacrifice other needs, and adopt unhealthy diets. Thanks to our recommendation, the school formed a Food Insecurity Committee, and this year HSPH began piloting a program called the "Daily Dollar Deal," offering students various \$1 meals throughout the week.

Additionally, in partnership with students from Harvard, Emory, and Amherst College, I participated in a First-Gen Grad School Life panel at Amherst College, sharing my personal perspective on my time at HSPH in an effort to help others navigate the same difficulties I have experienced.

In the past year, I became an ambassador for the Gates Millennium Scholars Alumni Association (after having been a Gates Millennium Scholar myself), tasked with overseeing the mentorship, networking, and career building opportunities for 20,000 U.S. minority scholars located around the world. And in my professional capacity at the EPA, I've had the opportunity to serve at-risk and marginalized groups from across the country. When I worked with the Puerto Rican and Virgin Islands communities that were devastated by hurricanes Maria, Irma, and Harvey, I collaborated with them to ensure that they would not be forgotten or overlooked in future emergency planning. By listening to their stories and documenting their concerns, I was able to create recommendations that amplified their voices, which otherwise might have been ignored.