

Harvard Overseers candidate questionnaire: Tyler Jacks

1. How important should diversity be at Harvard? What strategies should the University pursue regarding this? (Please discuss specific programs, including Ethnic Studies, and policies if you can.)

Diversity is, indeed, a critical issue at Harvard, among its student body and among its faculty. A diverse student body contributes directly and significantly to the educational mission of the university through the peer-to-peer sharing of individual experiences and perspectives, which collectively inform the students' understanding of society and the world around them. Such experiences make all Harvard students more effective citizens and more effective leaders. Admissions policies and practices that ensure a diverse student body are important starting points for achieving these goals. I also believe that it is critical that all students feel a sense of belonging at Harvard, including through the support of inclusive, student-led activities that celebrate diversity and explore the importance of a diverse society.

You have asked specifically about the call for creating a new program in Ethnic Studies at Harvard. I am frankly surprised that one does not exist already, and, therefore, I would support efforts by the faculty and the administration to establish one.

I should add that diversity at Harvard must also include a diverse faculty. First, it is important to engage in active recruitment and encouragement of prospective faculty members from diverse backgrounds. Effective and engaged mentoring of junior faculty from different backgrounds is critical for those individuals to succeed through academic advancement and other aspects of career success. Regarding diversity in the faculty ranks, it is important to address gender-based inequalities in departments where they exist.

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

Harvard alumni are and should be a reflection of the university. As such, the alumni leaders need to reflect the diversity of the student body. To the extent that the leadership lacks sufficient diversity—among its officers, directors, heads of club and group activities—encouragement of candidates from diverse backgrounds should be undertaken and, as necessary, active recruitment of such individuals. Harvard has always had an active and supportive alumni community, and its engagement is critical to the university's success. The alumni network also represents an important resource to current students and recent graduates. Here again, it is important to ensure that all students feel a sense of inclusion and participation in alumni-related activities.

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

I believe that Harvard's admissions policies and practices need to ensure a diverse student body. This should include consideration of race as well as a number of other factors related to the individual applicant.

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

As the most prestigious academic institution in the country, Harvard has a responsibility to help shape a more equitable and just society. As discussed above, this can and should occur through its own policies related to admissions and educational opportunities on campus as well as through engagement in public discourse of societal challenges and efforts to affect public policy.

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 have not been involved in addressing diversity issues at Harvard directly. In my own laboratory at MIT over the past 26+ years, I have trained several students, fellows and staff from under-represented minority (URM) backgrounds, in part through outreach programs designed to increase opportunities for URM students with interests in science. Six of my current 42 trainees and staff members come from URM backgrounds. Gender balance has also been a high priority in my laboratory recruiting practices over the course of my career in cancer research, with the explicit goal of increasing the percentage of women with careers in cancer research and related fields. Of the more than 300 individuals who have worked in my laboratory over this period, more than 58% are women. Of note, of the seven current Harvard Medical School faculty members who trained in my laboratory, six are women.