

Harvard Ethnic Studies Coalition
118 McFaddin Hall
Ithaca, NY 14853

June 4, 2018

President-elect Lawrence S. Bacow
Office of the President
Harvard University
Massachusetts Hall
Harvard Yard
Cambridge, MA 02138

Dear President-elect Bacow:

We, the Harvard Ethnic Studies Coalition, urge President-elect Bacow, Provost Garber, and the Advisory Committee to select a Dean who can develop a home for ethnic studies within the Faculty of Arts and Sciences.

Ethnic studies examines some of the most fundamental and pressing questions of our time using epistemologies and frameworks about race, ethnicity, and indigeneity, as well as their intersections with gender, sexuality, class, immigration, and disability. As scholar Lisa Lowe suggests, “Ethnic Studies scholars do not reproduce the methods of the literary, historical, or sociological studies merely to celebrate ‘ethnic culture’ as an object separated from the material conditions of production and reception; they theorize, in a critical and dialectical manner, the relationship between cultural artifacts and the social groupings by which they are produced and which they, in turn, help to produce.” The field does not merely diversify the subject matter of traditional disciplines but instead provides unique theoretical apparatuses to analyze axes and relations of power.

Ethnic studies emerged out of the civil rights era and has been rooted in innovative research, critical pedagogy, and interdisciplinarity since its inception. As the home for undergraduate education and the liberal arts at Harvard, the Faculty of Arts and Sciences has the responsibility to foster disciplines that contribute to its “being at the forefront of teaching and learning and fostering cutting-edge research and discovery.” We, then, find it unacceptable for FAS to have neither a department nor a standalone degree program in ethnic studies, especially considering that the Committee on History & Literature, the Committee on Ethnicity, Migration, Rights, and the Program in American Studies have no autonomous faculty lines. Harvard’s undergraduate and graduate students cannot be successful “citizens and citizen-leaders for our society” when they have been deprived of the

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opportunity to learn about some of the most crucial and complex social realities of the modern world, including empire, immigration, and settler colonialism.

Currently, Harvard has no academic program that allows its students to earn a degree in ethnic studies. This is in stark contrast to our peer institutions, including Yale, Stanford, Columbia, Brown, and UC Berkeley, to name a few. They have departments, undergraduate majors and minors, graduate degree programs, and research centers. Harvard lags behind its peer institutions because it does not invest in the field that is producing the most crucial scholarship for understanding the racialization of people of color in the United States and beyond.

Findings from University-led initiatives and student advocacy demonstrate the dire need for ethnic studies at Harvard. In 2015, the Harvard College Working Group on Diversity and Inclusion found that “Harvard’s commitment to a broad-based liberal arts education would be better served by having a more robust curriculum in this area through increased attention to diversity and difference.” In addition, student advocates for ethnic studies have submitted 12 petitions in the past 45 years to University administrators. Over 1,000 students, alumni, faculty, and staff, as well as 27 student and alumni organizations, signed the most recent petition from 2016.

Though FAS has developed several entities and resources for ethnic studies in the recent years, they remain scattered across FAS, poorly supported, and under-resourced. Ethnicity, Migration, Rights has had three different Directors in the past 12 months, and there were no courses on Asian American Studies, Arab American Studies, or Mixed Race Studies offered for History & Literature concentrators in the Ethnic Studies field in Fall 2017. American Studies, which most often hosts ethnic studies faculty and degree programs at other institutions like Yale and Columbia, had 0 courses in ethnic studies available for its graduate students in Fall 2017. It is clear that FAS must find a way to redress the fragmented and neglected state of ethnic studies across various programs at Harvard and establish an FAS-wide entity dedicated to ethnic studies.

The next Dean of FAS must be a leader who prioritizes the need for ethnic studies at Harvard, engages regularly with ethnic studies scholarship, and possesses the vision to establish an academic entity that can bring together students, scholars, and faculty. Such an entity would offer undergraduate concentrations and secondary fields, as well as graduate degrees and graduate-level secondary fields. It would also have its own faculty lines and postdoctoral positions to ensure diversity of intellectual thought across the disciplines within ethnic studies, such as Native American and Indigenous Studies, Latinx Studies, Asian American Studies, Arab American Studies, and Mixed Race Studies. By providing a much-needed intellectual space for research and education on race and ethnicity, Harvard can adhere more strongly to its own responsibilities to teaching, learning, and critical inquiry. It can once again establish itself as a leader in liberal arts education.

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Respectfully submitted,

Harvard Ethnic Studies Coalition
Alumnae of Color Initiative
American Studies Junto
Asian American Brotherhood
Association of Black Harvard Women
Coalition for a Diverse Harvard
Concilio Latino de Harvard
Dharma: Harvard's Hindu Students Association
Fuerza Latina
Harvard African Students Association
Harvard Arab Alumni Association
Harvard Asian American Alumni Alliance
Harvard Black Alumni Society
Harvard Black Students Association
Harvard College Act On A Dream Club
Harvard College First Generation Student Union
Harvard College Half Asian People's Association
Harvard College Latino Men's Collective
Harvard Gender and Sexuality Caucus
Harvard GSAS Iranian Student Association
Harvard Hong Kong Society
Harvard Islamic Society
Harvard Japan Society
Harvard Korean Association
Harvard Latino Alumni Alliance
Harvard Queer Asian and Pacific Islander Association
Harvard SEAS Society of Hispanic Engineers
Harvard Society of Arab Students
Harvard Taiwanese Cultural Society
Harvard Thai Society
Harvard University Muslim Alumni
Harvard Vietnamese Association
Harvard-Radcliffe Asian American Association
Harvard-Radcliffe Asian American Women's Association
Harvard-Radcliffe Chinese Students Association

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Holoimua O Hawaii

Latinas Unidas de Harvard College

LGBTQ@GSAS

Native American Alumni of Harvard University

Native Americans at Harvard College

Phillips Brooks House Association

Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia Association

Society for the Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science Harvard
Chapter

South Asian Alumni Alliance

South Asian Women's Collective

Task Force on Asian and Pacific American Studies at Harvard College

W.E.B. Du Bois Graduate Society

Enclosures

cc: Provost Alan M. Garber

FAS Dean Search Advisory Committee