

Responses from Robert L. Satcher MD '94 PhD MIT '93  
Astronaut, Physician-Scientist

*1. How important should diversity, equity and inclusion be at Harvard, and what strategies should the University pursue to address these? If you can, please discuss specific programs and policies (e.g., Ethnic Studies; faculty hiring, tenure and advancement; Harvard's pledge in its 1650 Charter to actively facilitate the education of American Indian youth; Harvard's legacy of slavery; environmental justice).*

The adverse impacts on higher education that result from racism, sexism, etc. are an impediment to realizing the vision of Harvard, as with other universities. In many cases, even without perceived intent, there are harmful outcomes, that are preventable with appropriate engagement. Allowing these deficiencies to continue represents a knowledge gap that committed institutions, such as Harvard, have recognized as being unacceptable and detrimental. As part of my participation on the Board, I will work to support effective programs and services to counteract structural discrimination. Over the years, Harvard has instituted numerous programs and efforts such as Ethnic studies, an objective examination of Harvard's legacy of slavery, environmental justice studies, and policies that both directly and indirectly impact diversity in faculty hiring, tenure, and advancement. I consider these approaches to be critical for driving sustainable change. Additionally, it is important to further develop our understanding of the faculty and institution's needs, culture, stress points, strengths, and weaknesses. As such, I support ongoing mechanisms that further adapt Harvard's comprehensive strategic plans for change. Individual and group listening tours and town hall meetings, use of shared governance, strategic planning workshops, and leveraging our shared values and priorities are essential to success. Commitment and enthusiasm from critical stakeholders are essential to initiating and sustaining change. And finally, real change is supported by strong analytics that measure the impact of new programs and provide feedback to the administration and faculty on the success of program engagement for achieving desired outcomes.

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

The impending Supreme Court decision on affirmative action for both Harvard and UNC cases is expected in June 2023. Barring the unlikely scenario of no changes in the legal statute, there will be the need to reexamine how Harvard addresses how to achieve diversity in its admissions, and in particular, how these changes will affect the inclusion of underrepresented groups of all ethnicities, and women. The expected changes will also likely alter the landscape of affirmative action in education across the country. Although this development is concerning and potentially disappointing, it presents an opportunity to reexamine how to achieve the related goals of diversity and inclusion, while balancing equity and fairness. Over the last 22 years, as a physician-scientist, surgical-oncologist, clinician, educator, and academic leader, I have participated in admissions at numerous institutions, where DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) has been an issue for strategic advancement. Harvard's commitment to diversity and inclusiveness in its admissions as a core aspect of its vision is admirable, and as circumstances show, requires vigilance and evolution to meet both new and persistent challenges. I am excited by the possibility of being a part of fulfilling this enduring mission.

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

Enhancing the pipeline of individuals in academic fields is essential for a better future, and as a leader in higher education, Harvard plays an important role in facilitating and achieving that vision. I am enthusiastic about the mission at Harvard for recruitment, retention, and mentoring, of faculty, staff, and students from racial, ethnic, and culturally diverse backgrounds--and the complementary commitment to social and environmental justice. Harvard is an important voice for addressing racism, xenophobia, and resulting problems, with the effect of providing needed leadership in creating a more equitable, inclusive and just society.

*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? Are you a member of any of the signing organizations below?*

DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) has been a driving principle and commitment that I have endorsed throughout my career. My experience with DEI extends to my undergraduate and graduate years at MIT, where I was part of a student led effort that examined faculty diversity and made recommendations to the administration about how to increase representation from minority groups. Next as a student at Harvard Medical School, I participated with three other MD-PhD students and a faculty advisor in producing a blue-print document presented to the administration that helped facilitate the establishment of the office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, and the hiring of its first director. During my years at Northwestern, I was actively involved in recruiting faculty and mentoring students from underrepresented minority groups. These efforts led to increased representation. Continuing at NASA, we informally organized support groups amongst African American Astronauts, who have historically been underrepresented in the Astronaut Corps. Our efforts to promote STEM education in underrepresented groups led to a documentary entitled "The Color of Space: A NASA Documentary Showcasing the Stories of Black Astronauts", produced by my crewmate, Leland Melvin. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S6vYHdH0AeE> In my current position at MD Anderson Cancer Center, efforts towards improving DEI have continued. In my opinion, all members of the health system, regardless of status, must be committed to DEI and wellness. These issues are not only about recruitment, which of course is highly important at all levels of our organization, but also creating an environment for all to thrive in their employment. I was appointed to the Division of Surgical Oncology DEI committee, and subsequently led internal initiatives to recruit and retain faculty, fellows, postdoctoral fellows, and staff. The Department and Division have made strides in unconscious bias training, bystander training, participating in multiple open discussions regarding inclusion, among other successes. MD Anderson has recently hired its first DEI director after coordinated efforts led by a group of African American faculty of which I was integrally involved.

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

If elected, I would be willing to meet with leaders and/or memberships of the Coalition for Diverse Harvard.