

## Harvard Overseer Questionnaire

Ming Min Hui

MBA 2015

Executive Director, Boston Ballet

- 1. How important should diversity, equity, and inclusion be at Harvard, and what strategies should the University pursue to address these? Please discuss specific programs and policies regarding, for example: Ethnic Studies; faculty hiring, tenure, and advancement; the 1650 Charter's pledge to facilitate education of American Indian youth; Harvard's legacy of slavery; environmental justice measures; etc.**

There are three different types of cases to make for prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, and I submit that all apply to Harvard:

- The "Social Impact" case points to the importance of these efforts to move the needle on outcomes for disadvantaged populations
- The "Values Alignment" case points to the importance of living the stated values of an organization
- The "Business Outcomes" case points to the practical matter of improved morale, talent pipeline, and retention that has been proven to stem from such efforts, making it the smart thing to do not just the right thing to do

Improving diversity, equity, and inclusion is extraordinarily complex and multifaceted work: systems of privilege cannot be dismantled overnight or in any one way. Strategies must encompass both who and how: reducing bias in hiring and promotional practices to encourage diversity at all ranks of an organization, while educating all members of the community to build awareness and empathy for underrepresented voices in creating a culture of belonging. Programs to build understanding and seek reparations for the past must also come with investments in present and future society building. These efforts take investment, but if aligned well with the mission and unique positioning of the University in the world arena they can be powerful vehicles for the kind of change and conversation that Harvard is expected to lead. The Report of the Committee on Harvard & the Legacy of Slavery points to seven recommendations developed through a robust process that the University has accepted in full alongside a historic commitment of \$100 million to fund their implementation. This is a strong model for the kind of transformative and strategic work that addresses efficacy, feasibility, and visibility in DEIB efforts. Importantly, the University should remain focused on several key priorities and initiatives to avoid stretching its resources too thin and risking doing too many things poorly rather than a few things well.

- 2. Given the Supreme Court's ruling against race-conscious admissions, what measures should the University adopt to promote student-body diversity along multiple dimensions, including racial diversity?**

Although explicit race-conscious admissions is no longer an option for elite universities, there are approaches that Harvard can consider adopting or strengthening in admissions to approximate some of the objectives to appropriately diversify its classes and reconcile with systems of privilege:

- Holistic review of students allows admissions committees to consider the “whole” applicant, rather than disproportionately focusing on any one factor. A student’s lived experience is the center of a holistic admissions process and enables admissions to consider a student’s context alongside their achievements and scores.
- Measures focused on socioeconomic diversity focus on admitting students from families with low incomes, lower levels of education, or from disadvantaged neighborhoods and high schools. In a similar vein, Harvard may consider reassessing the use of early decision and early admissions policies as these can preference students who come from more advantaged families with the resources to prepare for earlier deadlines.
- Enhancements to financial aid programs could also be considered, such as improved estimations for students on how much financial aid they could receive before applying or upon receiving acceptance. Scholarship funds earmarked for minority or low-income students may also present a meaningful way to develop access.
- Diversifying admissions pipeline is also a way to ensure racial diversity is amplified at the beginning of the admissions funnel. Racially conscious outreach, recruitment, and support programs that focus on bridging gaps in knowledge, resources, or confidence can also go a long way to encouraging minority and low-income students to apply.

Lastly, it is worth noting that while admission is an important dimension of ensuring access and inclusion, supporting historically underrepresented students that have been admitted is also an important feature to retention and setting them up for success.

**3. Do you support the elimination of admissions preferences for recruited athletes, children of donors, and children of alumni (legacy)? Please address all three categories.**

Yes, I have always found these admissions preferences problematic and out of line with the responsibility that elite educational institutions have in leveling the playing field for the society it serves. There is already significant advantage granted to students in the legacy and donor categories by nature of their upbringing – they are more likely than other students to have had the exposure, resources, and sense of entitlement that can translate into successful outcomes (in elite university admissions and in life). In light of the ruling against race-conscious admissions, it is hypocritical for the continuation of some tips but not others that are based on conditions of a student’s birth. Athletic recruitment is also an explicit, group-based quota system that goes against the spirit of the Supreme Court’s decision.

**4. In light of recent turmoil—from the doxxing of students to the resignation of President Gay—how do you think Harvard can ensure key institutional values such as: academic independence from political and financial strong-arming; free expression on campus (including the right to protest); and safety for all?**

The guiding principle that one person’s freedom ends where another’s begins suggests that free expression must be vigorously upheld, but not at the expense of others’ feelings of safety and belonging in the community. Harvard’s academic community requires free expression and inquiry, but alongside that is the responsibility to respect the dignity of others and openness to constructive change. Robust administrative policies and processes to uphold individual freedoms and personal rights helps to create a culture in which this balance is adjudicated. The values of

an organization are expressed in the behaviors it is willing to tolerate. Holding all members of a community to high standards of integrity, intellectual honesty, tolerance, and mutual respect is expressed through the example of leaders, disciplinary action, and the mythology of what is celebrated or rewarded. Importantly, Harvard's job is to create a climate for healthy and inclusive discourse, which means openness to different political opinions (even if unpopular) and zero tolerance for racism, sexual harassment, and calls for violence.

**5. What steps have you taken to bring diversity and inclusion to Harvard, to your workplace, and/or to other organizations? Are you a member of any of the signing groups below?**

When I was an undergraduate at Yale, my primary extracurricular activities included leadership roles in organizations that celebrated the Asian American community and promoted women's leadership. This was very much an expression of this phase of personhood formation for me, and grappling with my identity as a Chinese woman in a world steeped in privilege and power that historically didn't accrue to people who looked like me. Now as Executive Director at Boston Ballet, I bring some of my personal experience with "otherness" to leadership in the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) work at Boston Ballet – it adds urgency and empathy to complex and often vulnerable conversations necessary to make progress. Classical ballet is often perceived as an elitist and Eurocentric artform. Much of classical ballet canon was produced at a time when choreographers had little exposure to other nations and peoples, so they carry problematic caricature and stereotypes. The work we do at Boston Ballet is multifaceted and governed around three key priorities: evolve the relevance our artistic identity and repertoire, build a more racially diverse team, and create a thriving and inclusive workplace. These priorities reinforce each other, and in totality push the organization to continually rewrite the narrative on who dance is by and for. We are evolving the mindset of the organization from thinking of DEIB as a matter of compliance or discrete initiatives towards a holistic sense that DEIB is a lens through which we scrutinize everything we do. We invest in both internal and external initiatives, including the implementation of governing bodies, methods of measurement, programmatic and artistic changes, training and education, access mechanisms, and more. This is a core dimension of the organization's expression of its strategy and values, and I seek to bring my experiences with the work to the Harvard Board of Overseers.

**6. What role do you think Harvard can and should play in defending democracy in the US and around the world?**

A strong democracy is comprised of five ingredients: empowered citizens, fair process, responsive policy, information & communication, and social cohesion. Democracy provides an environment that respects human rights and fundamental freedoms, and in which the freely expressed will of people is exercised. Harvard's primary function as an academic institution is to serve as an educator for generations of active leaders and participants in a robust democracy, and as a convener for thought leadership in advancing the pursuit of democratic ideals worldwide. Harvard is also a large and significant institution with many constituents, and I applaud efforts from the University to encourage voter registration and civic engagement within its community.