

Dear Candidates,

Issues of racial justice, equity and inclusion at Harvard are front and center throughout the University. Our organizations care deeply about these matters.

As in prior years, we are providing a questionnaire to all candidates for Overseer and Elected Director. Your answers to the following questions will help guide our members in their voting. **Please send a pdf** with your answers to directorelection@gmail.com by 5 p.m. ET on **Monday, February 14**.

Please know that the organizations listed below are independent groups that will act according to their individual missions and constituencies in considering the upcoming election and may or may not choose to make voting recommendations. They may wish to follow up with you with further questions/discussion. In particular, please note that the Coalition for a Diverse Harvard is not an umbrella group for the organizations signing on to this questionnaire.

1. How important should diversity be at Harvard? What strategies should the University pursue to address diversity? (Please discuss specific programs and policies, including Ethnic Studies; faculty hiring, tenure, and advancement; and Harvard's pledge in its 1650 Charter to actively facilitate the education of American Indian youth, if you can.)
2. Please state your views on affirmative action and race-conscious admissions.
3. What do you think Harvard's role should be 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?
5. If elected, would you be willing to meet occasionally with the leaders and/or memberships of the groups below during your tenure?

Questionnaire responses will be posted on the website of the Coalition for a Diverse Harvard, DiverseHarvard.org.

Please confirm receipt of this email.

We look forward to hearing from you. Thank you.

To the leaders and members of the Coalition for a Diverse Harvard including:

[First Generation Harvard Alumni](#)
[Harvard Arab Alumni Association](#)
[Harvard Asian American Alumni Alliance](#)
[Harvard Black Alumni Society](#)
[Harvard Gender & Sexuality Caucus](#)
[Harvard Latino Alumni Alliance](#)
[Harvard Progressive Jewish Alumni](#)
[Harvard South Asian Alumni Alliance](#)
Harvard Tamil Sangam Alumni
Harvard Women of Color
[Native American Alumni of Harvard University](#)

Thank you for these thoughtful questions. Below are my responses.

1. How important should diversity be at Harvard? What strategies should the University pursue to address diversity? (Please discuss specific programs and policies, including Ethnic Studies; faculty hiring, tenure, and advancement; and Harvard's pledge in its 1650 Charter to actively facilitate the education of American Indian youth, if you can.)

In my time as President of the Harvard Club of Seattle, I made it my mission to listen and learn. Elected at just 22-years-old to be president of a 131-year-old alumni club, I knew that I had to lean on the wisdom of those around me to augment my own limited experiences and views of the world. Yes, I was a minority, but growing up as a Ghanaian American tech employee from an almost all-white suburb north of Seattle still left me with known and unknown blind spots. I aspired to run a *diverse* alumni club for the more than 6,000 members and affiliates who despite varied beliefs, racial backgrounds, and economic histories shared in their appreciation of Harvard University and the alumni family. My role was and is to fairly represent and create programming for them all.

It was in this role that I was educated by Emily Van Dyke '03 MPH '09 and Patrik Johansson MPH '01 (two of our Seattle club board members) about Caleb Cheeshahteumuck (AB 1665) and Joel Iacoomes (AB 1665), members of the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah). They were the first two Indigenous graduates of Harvard and members of the tribe upon whose land Harvard sits. I also learned about Tiffany Smalley (AB 2011), the third member of the Wampanoag Tribe to graduate from Harvard College. As I learned more through oral histories, letters, and books which Emily and Patrick graciously shared with me, I began to deeply reflect why it took nearly 346 years for a third Wampanoag Tribe member to graduate from Harvard despite Harvard's explicit 1650 Charter to educate "English and Indian youth of this country in knowledge and godliness"?

As I searched for answers (oftentimes answers that were erased to history), I realized that the process of discovery and reflection was just as important as the issues at hand. I began to intentionally organize public events for our club to discuss and jointly find answers to hard questions and realities about indigenous slavery (with the late Everett G. "Tall Oak" Weeden Jr), diversity in mountaineering (with Sophia Danenberg AB '94 the first black woman to summit Mount Everest), exploring the roots of anti-Asian American violence (with Dr. Hao Huang AB '78), and post-disaster relief in Lebanon (while also fundraising for the Harvard University Alumni Association of Lebanon). I took my position of influence seriously and hoped to pass the microphone to groups who often were silenced or forgotten.

The story of Indigenous alumni and my ability to instigate meaningful dialogue globally was one of the first instances as a public leader where I iterated through the full cycle of learning, consolidating, and acting to create change. While there are a great many issues to improve diversity at Harvard and in the alumni community, I always attempt to avoid hubris: instead focusing on coalition building, deep listening, and peer-research to

inform active decision making. As an Elected Director of the Harvard Alumni Association, I would push to do the same.

More specifically, I believe there is room for Harvard to implement several programs to improve diversity at Harvard. All, of course, while listening to the voices of the experts in (and especially out of) the colloquial “room” who have dedicated time to unpacking the best paths forward. Three which I am passionate about include:

- Improving access to the educational escalator by supporting the preparation of underrepresented students even before college (including black and Latinx students, LGBTQ+ students, Wampanoag and other tribal citizens, and first-generation or low-income students of all races/backgrounds) through more targeted recruiting programs, dedicated scholarships for these students when admitted to Harvard, dedicated support for internship programs for these students while enrolled at Harvard, and specific efforts to include and subsidize these students in the Crimson Summer Academy and the Harvard Secondary School (Summer) program.
- Reviewing and implementing comparable programs from peer institutions who have meaningful relationships with marginalized community groups and peoples (some examples of where to start are the relationship between the Miami Tribe and Miami University or between Aboriginal Communities and the University of Melbourne)
- Creating a more streamlined process for Harvard alumni to nominate candidates in Claudine Gay’s initiative to hire 4 more professors to an ethnic studies department. Namely, supporting the movement for Asian American Studies along with the delayed initiative of FAS to hire three to four senior faculty in Latinx, Asian American, and Muslim studies by the end of the 2019-2020 academic year

Of course, it goes without saying that these initiatives are a fraction of what is needed to make Harvard’s community more diverse and accepting. However, my mission will always be to focus on receiving input first from our Shared Interest Groups (specifically those organizations signing onto this questionnaire) to enact more meaningful programs and initiatives.

I don’t claim to know it all, but I commit to learning enough from every community to try to make things better.

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

Growing up as a black man in America, I was always acutely aware of the various forms of systemic racism I would have to face. While much was indirect (e.g. the legacy of Jim Crow laws and red lining), there were of course direct digs at me (friends who would say “you only got into Harvard because you’re black!” despite my higher SAT scores or grades). My parents, knowing this history through experience and anecdote, reiterated to me the importance of education as the great equalizer.

With the latest two supreme court cases about Affirmative Action (which include organizations like Harvard, the University of North Carolina, and SFFA or Students for Fair Admissions), there is a renewed discussion about the legality of considering race with regards to admission. I believe that a racially diverse and socio-economically diverse student body are extremely important in the development of individuals at an institution like Harvard. Moreover, a diverse class is necessary to prepare individuals for the diverse world that we will all need to live in during the next 50 years and beyond.

I support race-conscious admissions and affirmative action but am also cognizant of the need to always improve admissions systems to avoid discriminatory practices. For instance, there could certainly be more transparency at Harvard in how students are rated during the admissions process to remove implicit bias (for instance, what

unconscious biases is hidden in a “personality score” where Asian students score lower than their peers?). Moreover, there could also be more done to reveal the racial and socio-economic background of admitted candidates from the “Harvard Z-list,” of admitted legacy students, and of recruited athletes for “luxury sports” that many BIPOC students do not have access to (e.g. polo, water polo, golf, squash). Every system can be improved and, as a supporter of affirmative action, I know that the race-conscious admissions implemented today at Harvard or other institutions may not be the perfect system for race-conscious admissions.

I believe that while we have come far, there is always further to go. Affirmative action and the case of equity through education is just one step towards racial justice. We need to also think about how to uplift low-income students such that race-conscious admissions policies do not only serve upper-class BIPOC students or families. We must also think about whose voices are missing from these discussions, especially as they become entangled in media cycles focused on headlines rather than legislation.

One issue that I believe is severely under talked about is what happens to black, Latinx, Asian American, Muslim, students and others who begin at Harvard under-resourced, under-mentored, and under-supported. While it is important to be race-conscious, we must also be race-inclusive: creating systems that enable our diverse students to thrive once they arrive on campus. Admissions are a start, but bridge programs ([like Princeton’s SIFP program](#)); dedicated students, alumni, or faculty mentors; and more diverse faculty can help to enable success for admitted students of more diverse backgrounds.

These discussions around admissions are hard, and their solutions require the bravery to experiment, iterate, and improve. As an Elected Director of the Harvard Alumni Association, I can commit to at least always being willing to engage in all sides of an issues whether I agree with it or not to learn and create a mosaic solution that uses Harvard’s influence for good.

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

There is no denying the influence that attending Harvard bestows both formally and informally. Formally, Harvard prepares the future leaders of government, business, academia, and more through a community of deeply thoughtful classes, peers, and alumni. Informally, Harvard alumni are seen as individuals with reasoned viewpoints and a bias for action to implement them. Given this outsized influence, Harvard has a responsibility to educate its student body to understand systemic inequality and the effects that our messy past has on our present.

Unfortunately, Harvard does not always deliver on this promise. I realized this most acutely during my sophomore year at Harvard when I enrolled in “Black Business Leaders and Entrepreneurship” at Harvard Business School. The course was a case-based class focused on teaching the stories of black case protagonists. Created by Steve Rogers (the first black professor I ever had in my two-decade life as a student), the aim of the class was to create more diverse curriculum for Harvard’s students (a role which Harvard should actively take beyond the business school). I learned and experienced how currently, less than 10 percent of case studies developed and disseminated by the Business School—which produces more than 80 percent of cases sold globally—feature women as protagonists (as reported by [The Harvard Crimson](#)). The numbers are similarly low for Arab, Asian, Black, Latino, LGBTQ+, Jewish, and South Asian case protagonists.

Out of the business school, I’ve noticed the same issues: unless a student is explicitly studying ethnic studies or gender studies discussions of equity, inclusion, or justice may be overlooked. How can Harvard claim to effectively educate the future generation without these considerations? I believe that Harvard must make a concerted effort to diversify its teaching staff, tenured faculty, and curriculum in all fields of study to truly deliver on its mission to “educate the citizens and citizen-leaders for our 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?

Through the Harvard Club of Seattle I've attempted to bring diversity and inclusion to Harvard through chairing and funding the "Crimson Achievement Program," putting financial commitments towards D&I initiatives, and creating partnerships to amplify diverse voices.

The Harvard Club of Seattle Crimson Achievement Program (CAP program) provides high-potential high school students (CAP Scholars) with the opportunity to gain new learning, receive mentorship support from Harvard students and recent grads, and participate in enrichment opportunities that support their path to college, including a field trip to Harvard and other Boston Area. Drawn from Western Washington school districts that serve predominantly low-income populations, CAP Scholars, in turn, invest in the success of their communities by providing at least ten annual hours of peer mentorship and other service that promotes the college and career readiness of fellow students. As the chair of this program in 2018 and 2019, I was honored to help recruit more than a dozen CAP mentors and scholars. The work of Alexis Wheeler '09 (the program founder) and I is featured in this January 2020 [Harvard Gazette article](#).

During my time as president of the Harvard Club of Seattle, I have continued to fund the CAP program and expanded our financial commitment to include free SAT and ACT test prep for CAP Scholars. Additionally, during my tenure, I have moved to double the Harvard Club of Seattle's sponsorship of the Summer Community Service Fellowship and worked with our board members to implement remote service opportunities such as tutoring ELL immigrant students via zoom in partnership with Harvard Alumni for Education.

Of course, the last 2 years as president of the Harvard Club of Seattle have been difficult because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Where others saw a freeze, I used the remote-first environment to focus on partnership as a methodology of amplifying diverse voices, including many of the voices in the signing organizations represented below. In the last 2 years, we have co-hosted and co-marketed nearly 100 events in topics ranging from how to prevent anti-Asian American violence to discussions of missing & murdered indigenous women & girls to environmental journalism and climate change.

As a former non-profit executive director myself, I hope to push Harvard to be more aware and action-oriented around diversity and inclusion through financial commitments for FLGI and BIPOC students before, during, and after their Harvard experience.

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

Yes! I think there should be a dedicated space for a dinner or lecture during the Clubs and SIG conference that the HAA hosts annually to facilitate these engagements even more formally. Outside of this conference, I am committed to meeting with these groups digitally or in person to open dialogues and continue learning.

I am excited to work further with all of your organizations.

Michael Bervell

2/14/2022

