

- 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).**

Our world, and each of our countries – no matter where we live – is increasingly more diverse than ever before. And Harvard University, our beloved alma mater, can be and should be no different. There is no question that diversity must be one of the most prominent features of Harvard. Rather, the questions must go deeper now.

What kind of diversity is Harvard still lacking in? What kinds of diversity must be further bolstered at the university? Which diversity initiatives of the University have worked well? Have we managed to drive true equity and inclusion in the student and faculty community at Harvard? The university consists of various Schools, Departments and Centers. Are all of them equally pro-active at driving diversity within their respective spheres? Where are the gaps that still exist? These are the questions that must be honestly answered and examined as we attempt to take diversity to the next level at Harvard.

Other HAA leaders have pointed, for example, to the Inclusion and Belonging Pulse Survey from 2019. The survey highlighted the fact that a large percentage of the student population (about a third) believe that the school leadership and administration might not take the appropriate action in response to incidents of harassment and discrimination. That is a major gap that needs remedial action immediately.

To fix this gap, there must be greater transparency in the reporting of the actions taken in response to such incidents. Those from underrepresented groups, especially, must feel that the leadership and administration is cognizant of their concerns, and will serve as their allies. For that, greater communication through various events - closed door sessions as well as otherwise – must be emphasized.

Still others have pointed to the 1650 Charter to educate “English and Indian youth of this country in knowledge and godliness”, and highlighted the severe shortcomings of the University in living up to the ideals set out in the Charter. With such few Native Americans having attended the University in the past 375 years, it is imperative that an urgent action plan be charted out to course correct.

At the same time, the University must also continue to build upon the good work that has been done so far. For example, the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) Connections<sup>1</sup>, a University-wide community engagement initiative to welcome and connect incoming community members to the various resources at their disposal, is a good start. The host of this annual event - the Harvard Office for Equity, Diversity,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://edib.harvard.edu/bipoc-connections>

Inclusion, and Belonging (OEDIB)<sup>2</sup> – is well-placed to further drive the creation and bolstering of support networks and resources for underrepresented community members. Its various initiatives – the Community Dialogues, Changemakers, Affinity Spaces, Culture Lab Grants, and others – all have the potential to drive real change on campus. But a quick survey of its recent activities suggests that the activities need to increase in frequency, scope and range.

A large international student population across schools – with certain schools such as HBS, HKS and HGSE boasting a fairly high share of international students – is a great foundation to build upon. As an international student myself, I have been immensely grateful to the opportunities the University offered me, and the deep friendships I made across various schools during my time there. At the same time, I also deeply understand the issues that international students still continue to face, whether logistically, financially or educationally. And those also clearly need to be addressed.

Clearly, the issue is not limited to the ethnic, racial or national backgrounds of the student population at Harvard. It is equally important that the faculty members, the administration and leadership, the coursework and curriculum, the research and all other activities of the University are also equally, if not more, diverse as the student population.

Certain trends are heartening. As per the data shared by the University, the share of women, nonbinary and faculty of color amongst the University's tenured professors has risen from 36% to 44% in 2023.<sup>3</sup> For tenure-track faculty, the number has risen from 54% in 2013 to 68% in 2023. This is a commendable rise in just a decade. However, it is also clear that there is still a long way to go.

While data is being tracked for the faculty composition, unfortunately, the data is not easily available for how much of the curriculum and academic research at Harvard is tailored to represent diverse groups. While certain courses do exist, and certain research grants are also available for underrepresented groups, it is definitely not enough. And this gap must be filled in a targeted, time-bound manner by the University. To start with, this data must be compiled and shared publicly, so that the trends can be tracked, like the faculty composition. In addition to correcting the student and faculty composition to reflect our world and societal diversity, the next decade's focus must lie on diversifying the curriculum, research and extra-curricular activities at the University.

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

Our world has historically been an unjust one, and it is up to us to decide whether we want to make it more just in the future. Whether it has been colonialism or

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<sup>2</sup> <https://edib.harvard.edu/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://faculty.harvard.edu/faculty-demographics-over-time>

industrialization or even the age of empire, certain unfair bases for discrimination have somehow survived over the centuries, if not millennia. This has meant that certain groups of people have been at a structural disadvantage to benefit from the opportunities that new economic and political systems offer. This has been true for blacks, for example, for centuries, whether it has been recently in the context of the US and its history of slavery, or the much longer history of slavery that underpins world history for the last millennia or even more. Similarly, in a country like India, certain groups have been denied an equal opportunity for millennia by structural societal norms.

And therefore, I believe it is important that we decide to try and build a more just, inclusive future. For that, actions and policies such as affirmative action and race-conscious admissions are tools that must be used, albeit wisely and purposefully.

As a receiver of multiple merit-based scholarships over the course of my academic and educational career, I had a very black-and-white view of merit. I believed that those who had it should move up in life. But over the years, I have come to realize that 'merit' itself is influenced by other factors, such as the equal opportunities to study, do well at standardized tests and succeed in general. It is therefore important for us to support the perceived gaps in 'merit' that we might find between two students from different racial or economic backgrounds.

We need affirmative action and race-conscious decisions to be able to provide a more equal playing field to everyone. I realize very well that it is extremely unfathomable to imagine a perfectly equal playing field, as new forms of inequality also keep getting added to our society. Therefore, it is important to continually adjust and update our ideas of what an equal or level playing field will actually entail.

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

Harvard has to take a leading role in creating a more equitable, inclusive and a just society. As one of the most pre-eminent educational and research institutions in the world, it has the unenviable responsibility also to demonstrate what a more equitable, inclusive and just society could look like, and illuminate the ways on how to get there. It also boasts of the enviable asset that most other institutions in the world cannot boast of: some of the best minds in the world from across various disciplines congregate at Harvard. Given this, Harvard would be doing a dis-service to the world, and to itself, if we as a university and a community didn't actually take the lead in creating a more equitable, inclusive and just society.

A few aspects of the role need to be highlighted. One, the coursework, research and curriculum at Harvard must continually showcase the rationale for, and the ways to achieve, such a society. Two, the community – the faculty members, the researchers, the students, the staff and administration, the leadership, and the alumni – must be diverse in its perspectives, backgrounds and approaches. Three, the university must enable a syncretic approach to emerge out of the community and the academic and

research work undertaken at the university. Four, we must all acknowledge that the achievement of an equitable, inclusive and just society is not an end point, rather it is a journey. Therefore, it is important to focus on not just removing or fighting old, established forms of discrimination or inequality, but also to have an eye on emerging forms of inequality and nip them in the bud to the extent possible. A good example of emerging forms of inequality would be unequal access to technology.

**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?**

As an international student at Harvard, I constantly attempted to bring diversity and inclusion to the university from various vantage points – classroom and coursework, student clubs and activities, research, and alumni engagement. One, in the courses that I took, I would bring international examples or case studies to bear on the discussions. The papers I would write would often focus on applying the principles I learnt in the classroom to situations that took place in other parts of the world. For example, in the Negotiations course I took at Harvard Law School, I wrote my final paper on the negotiations that took place between the Indian government and hijackers of an Air India plane while it was taken to Afghanistan. Similarly, many of my contributions in classroom discussions would rely heavily on my own international educational, professional and life experiences in Singapore, the UK, China, the US and India.

Similarly, on the student club front, I pushed for greater representation of international students on the Kennedy School Student Government (KSSG) as well as the Harvard Graduate Council. I was also the founder of the Harvard India Student Group (HISG), one of the first university-wide student groups at Harvard University. The goal of the HISG was – much like BIPOC Connections – to provide a support network and community forum for students of Indian origin on any of the schools on Harvard’s campus.

My research over the years – while at the Carnegie Endowment or even at Harvard – has often tried to bridge the gaps between nations. At Harvard, I did a research project that looked at the possible paths and mechanisms for cybersecurity cooperation between the US and India. At the Carnegie Endowment, I examined the ways in which countries like the US, Japan, China and India might further their bilateral cooperation and engagement. Through my research, I have often tried to find ways in which countries and people can come closer, understand each other better, and appreciate their respective perspectives and cultures – all core skills when it comes to managing and even leveraging diversity.

Finally, as an alumni leader, I tried to bring greater diversity to the Harvard Club of India (HCI), where I served as President from 2017 to 2019, by actively encouraging greater membership and leadership representation from underrepresented schools of Harvard. The HCI counted mostly alumni from Harvard Law School, Harvard Business School and the Harvard Kennedy School as its members. I actively worked

with friends and former classmates from Harvard Graduate School of Education, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, for example, to get them much more involved with the Harvard Club of India. We began organizing more events that would be of interest to alumni of these schools, and also brought in alumni from the schools into the Executive Committee of the HCI. Some of them have since gone on to assume senior leadership positions in the HCI. Similarly, during my tenure as President, we also did a major push to form sub-chapters of our alumni club in geographic regions of India other than the major metropolitan cities of India. We worked to nurture alumni leadership in smaller towns such as Patna, Ahmedabad, Lucknow and Chandigarh. All of these efforts enabled the Harvard Club of India to become a much more inclusive and diverse organization. Our efforts were acknowledged when we received the HAA Club and SIG Recognition Award for 2017-18 'for exceptional efforts resulting in outstanding improved or innovated programs in areas including: membership, technology, succession planning, community service, outreach, schools and scholarship efforts, programming, or overall general improvement.'

Later, as a HAA Director for Asia, I again worked to bring the various Alumni Clubs from all over the world closer together, through joint programming. We managed to organize several events that alumni from various international alumni clubs joined, but also initiated the sharing of information regarding events being organized by various Clubs across the Asia-Pacific. This allowed, for example, Harvard alumni in India to also attend events being organized by the Harvard Club of Singapore or the Philippines, and vice versa.

I am a member of the Coalition for Diverse Harvard, Harvard Asian American Alumni Alliance and Harvard South Asian Alumni Alliance.

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

Yes, of course! It would be my honor and privilege to work with leaders and members of the various groups that work together with the Coalition for Diverse Harvard to further the diversity and inclusion agenda at the University. I would especially look to work with these groups to identify new emerging areas of inequality and tackle them on an urgent basis, in addition to continuing the journey to dislodge established forms of injustice, inequality and non-inclusiveness.