

**DANGUOLE SPAKEVICIUS ALTMAN**  
**HARVARD BOARD OF OVERSEERS CANDIDATE**  
**DIVERSITY QUESTIONNAIRE – COALITION FOR A DIVERSE HARVARD**

- 1. How important should diversity be at Harvard? What strategies should the University pursue regarding this? (please discuss specific programs, including Ethnic studies and policies if you can).**

It is hard to imagine that Harvard could fully achieve its aspirations without diversity. Multiple studies have shown that diversity leads to better decision-making in organizations – please see HBS and McKinsey work on effective boards – attached. Harvard aspires to be not only the world's top research organization but also the top university where students learn, grow in their knowledge, and contribute to advances in all fields. Diversity of thought is often driven by diversity in life experiences – be that racial, gender, ethnic differences, socio-economic class, religion (or lack thereof), sexuality, other factors. All of these factors shape who we are, and help contribute to understanding and solving the world's problems. I believe that diversity at Harvard is a critical component of advancing Harvard's mission.

The best way for Harvard to improve diversity is probably through programs that encourage greater understanding of differences and promote respectful dialogue among individuals. Sharing stories and challenges may also encourage greater inclusiveness and belonging. On the undergraduate level, houses should play a key role in breaking down barriers. I support demographic-conscious admission and recruitment policies for students, faculty and administration. There could be a role for including required courses in the general curriculum which would encourage students to understand themselves and each other better, in an experiential but respectful way. In addition to expository writing, perhaps there should be a small seminar type class with students from different backgrounds.

On the topic of Ethnic studies, I certainly believe that studies of different racial and ethnic groups and their experiences is a legitimate field of study and would like to know more. My understanding is that Ethnic Studies would encompass African-American studies, Latino-American Studies, and other similar studies. I don't entirely understand the issues that have impeded sustaining such a department in the past – lack of demand/students interested in studying? Lack of funding? Why have similar studies succeeded elsewhere and not at Harvard? I also would like to better understand what the differences between these studies and those within existing departments such as History, Social Studies, Sociology or Organizational Behavior/Psychology would be. Is Ethnic Studies proposed as a separate department with its own faculty, or as an inter-disciplinary major such as Social Studies?

One related topic which may have impeded progress in the past is the general decline of students studying the humanities – not just at Harvard but also in the US as a whole. I am firmly committed to the study of liberal arts, which can include Ethnic Studies, as valuable. A liberal arts education provides a rich basis for better informed leaders and citizens who can

bridge differences and disciplines to solve problems. Yet liberal arts educations are challenged by the growth of targeted pre-professional educational programs, greater automated screening by employers which exclude candidates with traditional liberal arts majors, and increased job mobility/lowered onsite training which pushes employers toward already trained staff. Harvard needs to focus on work and career counselling programs, in particular for its undergraduates who are not immediately pursuing graduate and professional school upon graduation and who have pursued a broad liberal arts education. Harvard could address this by exploring both changes to curriculum (like making double-majoring in two very different fields easier) and also leveraging its huge alumni base to work with students to mentor them and employ them with meaningful summer internships which would lead to jobs. This would indirectly help students majoring in areas such as humanities – perhaps future Ethnic Studies – which are not directly applicable to a future job/career to also get good jobs upon graduation and not be pressured to major in something “more practical” because they fear unemployment.

**2. How can Harvard encourage more diversity among its alumni leaders and activities (if not discussed above).**

I believe Harvard generally does a good job in having its alumni leaders and activities reflect the diverse demographics its alumni, but more work can be done. As an Executive Committee member at HAA, and having served on many HAA committees, I know that HAA tries to select diverse leadership to reflect its alumni base. Over the past 15 years in particular, HAA has created many ways for alumni to engage, expanding from traditional Harvard clubs to Shared Interest Groups to developing other ways of connecting. Growing engagement and connection between alumni and the University have been major topics at HAA. That said, I'd like to see more work done. HAA could analyze differences between appointed/elected directors and its alumni body and work to pro-actively outreach to groups which may have been neglected.

One area Harvard should do a better job is with inclusion. You can have a diverse group, but not have members of the group always feel that they belong. To some extent, that is inevitable in a diverse group. The more diverse a group is, the more people can feel alone and try to seek out others that are like them rather than trying to seek out those unlike them in the group. Interestingly, the HBS research that shows that diverse teams outperform homogenous teams in solving problems also shows that these diverse teams are less likely to believe that their answer is correct. The homogenous teams were more likely to be wrong, but felt good about it, because new ideas were not introduced and comradery and “group think” prevented them from challenging assumptions as much. I believe the key to inclusivity is to build connectivity by helping people find commonality with others, beyond the superficial – gender, ethnicity, race, sexuality, political beliefs, etc. Inclusivity needs to start while future alumni are students - students who come out of Harvard feeling included are more likely to be alumni that care. As discussed above, for undergraduates, the House system seems to be a great place to start encouraging those conversations.

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

I do believe that Harvard should have race-conscious admissions but do not believe that Harvard should have quotas. We are fortunate as a University – we have so many qualified applicants with so many different backgrounds. I absolutely believe that diversity is key to Harvard’s mission (please see answer to #1). I do not understand how Admissions can evaluate an applicant without a holistic review of who they are and without considering all of the factors which made them who they are. Because there are so many qualified applicants, we have the luxury of admitting students who are diverse without compromising academic standards. Harvard should not lower academic standards to admit students who cannot do the work – that does not help anyone, the student nor Harvard. But we have plenty of applicants who meet our academic standards and can contribute to a diverse community. Firm quotas may undermine the legitimacy that diverse students feel about their admission. Quotas may also be hard to formulate – it is only race/gender – or should it include geographic, socio-economic class, religion, ethnicity?

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

At Harvard, we should model the society we hope to create. Children model their parents’ behavior much as students model their schools and employees model the values and behavior of their employers. Harvard should first make sure that it itself is equitable, inclusive and just – and by modeling that behavior, can help their students and our society’s future leaders do the same. Harvard has a responsibility to create an environment that develops and shapes values such as diversity, inclusion, and respect for different perspectives. The University can help take on some of the major challenges of this world and model how solving these challenges using different perspectives drives excellence. And then Harvard should tell people about how it was done, to publicize the result so that others would be inspired to follow.

**5. 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 in?**

My first step toward bringing diversity and inclusion to Harvard was attending. I was a first-generation American child of Lithuanian refugees who did not speak any English until kindergarten. I had a name no one could pronounce in a class with far more men than women (2:1 men: women) and majored in Economics, a department that had an even more skewed gender ratio than my class.

At HAA, I’ve made friends and developed strong relationships with alumni leaders of many different backgrounds (age, race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, nationality, etc.) and perspectives from myself. These relationships have enriched my life.

I’ve continued being an “oddbird” as a woman entrepreneur. I am used to being one of the few women raising money from investors, all of whom have been men. I have consciously tried in my management teams to have people from many different backgrounds. Vapogenix had a primarily female management team of different ethnicities and I consciously looked to hire men

to improve our diversity. Vapogenix is a small company, heavily populated with PhDs. We have successfully employed and worked with male, female, British, French, Indian, Vietnamese, Turkish, African-American, Native-American and Latino scientists.

As Chair of a board's Nominating Committee, I made improving diversity my first priority. I was the only woman on our 9-member board, which is a prestigious board of top executives. As we started the discussion, some board members were concerned that using gender and race to establish criteria for prospective board members was somehow unfair or lowered standards. I used all of the data that I mentioned in Question 1 (that diversity leads to improved problem-solving and performance) to help them understand that we were not lowering standards, but instead improving our performance as a team. I'm proud to say the next two positions were filled by an African-American man who was born poor, but became a successful attorney and a US Cabinet secretary, and a white woman with substantial international experience who had fought for religious freedom around the world. Both have been fabulous Board members.