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Candidate for HAA Elected Director

Coalition for a Diverse Harvard Candidate 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.)

Diversity is of the utmost importance and should be central at Harvard. Moreover, to fully address and embrace diversity, Harvard must also center inclusion, equity, and belonging. To do so, some strategies that Harvard should pursue are as follows:

- Build a comprehensive ethnic studies program, hire and promote diverse faculty in diverse fields (ethnic studies and STEM, humanities, and social sciences more broadly), and promote scholarship and classroom opportunities centered on diversity issues
- Re-structure the faculty promotion and tenure process to (1) include junior faculty, staff, and students in decision-making and (2) place greater emphasis on teaching, mentorship, and engagement with students, especially students from diverse backgrounds
- Renew a commitment to its 1650 Charter pledge to educate American Indian youth, build programming to support Native students on campus, and consider whether and how to make commitments to other groups
- Increase access to Harvard through financial aid and more affordable housing and child-care options
- Improve mental health and wellness services to ensure students from all backgrounds have the support they need to thrive at Harvard
- Implement more uniform and robust training for faculty, staff, and students in areas including pedagogy, sensitivity, and Title IX
- Help students with limited cultural capital gain access to existing resources and alumni networks
- Create more student-centric social spaces on campus (including for diverse identity and affinity groups), provide more funding for cultural and affinity organizations, facilitate student connections across schools, and promote greater equity of resource distribution among schools

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

Affirmative action and race-conscious admissions are key to equity in higher education and society at large, and I am deeply committed to both. First, these policies are critical tools in redressing centuries of race-based educational and economic inequality in the United States. Second, they foster diversity in educational settings, which contributes to all students' learning and growth. And third, they facilitate a pipeline to chip away at the persistent underrepresentation of minorities in positions of power.

As Harvard once again finds itself at the center of the fight about the future of affirmative action and race-conscious admissions, I believe that it is more important than ever that Harvard, its leaders, and members of its alumni community maintain their commitment to these policies.

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

Due to its far-reaching influence, Harvard has a singular responsibility to be at the forefront of creating a more equitable, inclusive, and just society. Having spent the better part of a decade on Harvard's campus, I have seen firsthand how Harvard's reactions to events—ranging from the Israel-Palestine conflict to changes in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program to the dining hall workers' strike—reverberate far beyond Cambridge. Therefore, I firmly believe that Harvard has a responsibility to carefully consider the consequences of its words and actions through the lens of equity, inclusion, and justice.

During my time as chair of the student advisory committee to Harvard's most recent presidential search in 2017-18, I was encouraged by how many students expressed that Harvard has a mandate to be a principled voice both locally and globally. In my view, Harvard should divest from the prison-industrial complex and prioritize the development of inclusive solutions to address students' negative experiences with, for example, policing on campus, mental health and wellness resources, and sexual assault and harassment reporting. These steps will both advance the cause of justice on Harvard's own campus and have a powerful ripple effect across other universities and organizations.

I also believe that Harvard must not only lead by example as an institution, but educate students on these same goals. Harvard should center teaching and research on issues related to justice, democracy, and equality. And that goes hand in hand with providing resources to students and alumni such that they feel equipped to pursue careers in which they can actively work toward 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?

During my seven years at Harvard—as an undergraduate, law student, resident tutor, and student leader—diversity and inclusion were always top of mind for me. For example:

- As a resident tutor in Cabot House, I facilitated conversations about diversity-related topics, worked with undergraduates and faculty on efforts to designate sanctuary sites on campus, and facilitated connections between resident tutors across houses and the Harvard Immigration and Refugee Clinic at the law school.

- As chair of the student advisory committee to Harvard’s presidential search, I prioritized soliciting feedback from members of diverse student groups and engaging with the university-wide inclusion and belonging task force.
- As a student at Harvard Law School, I co-chaired the Harvard Law Review’s diversity committee and led efforts to increase the number of editor slots offered based on holistic review.
- As an undergraduate at the College, I chaired the Women’s Initiative in Leadership at the Institute of Politics and worked closely with the Women’s Center on issues of representation and identity. I also oversaw the expansion of mentorship and scholarship programs at Harvard Model Congress.

In the various roles I have held professionally, I have strived to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion both within the workplace and outside of it. For example:

- As a voting rights lawyer, and formerly as a political organizer and educator, I take care to center communities of color and their experiences in my work. I began my legal career with internships at the NAACP Legal Defense Fund (LDF) and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), where I learned how to be an advocate for racial justice. Now at Elias Law Group, I regularly represent and engage with grassroots organizations working to lift the voices of racial and ethnic minority groups, youth, and labor. I am also engaged in conversations about diversifying the legal profession and supporting underrepresented groups in the workplace.
- At my prior law firm, I spearheaded efforts to encourage pro bono representation of incarcerated individuals against prison and other detention facilities, and I served as a liaison between my firm’s lawyers and Law 4 Black Lives DC. I also served on the hiring committee for recipients of a summer diversity scholarship.
- During my time in law school, I represented individuals who were incarcerated in Massachusetts prisons, and I worked on a project with the United States Department of Education to develop a salary negotiation toolkit for community college students from diverse backgrounds after conducting a series of interviews and focus groups.
- Earlier in my career, I served on the White House Appointee Engagement Kitchen Cabinet and as a mentor for other diverse political appointees in the Obama Administration.
- Finally, I take my responsibility to “pay it forward” seriously, and I regularly engage with a large group of mentees from diverse backgrounds who are interested in pursuing careers in law, government, and politics. As part of my mentoring work, I also speak on career-related panels for young women and people of color.

I am a member of the Coalition for a Diverse Harvard 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?

Absolutely. If elected, I intend to take and create as many opportunities as possible to learn from members of this community, as well as others.