

To the Coalition for a Diverse Harvard, comprised of:

Alumnae-i Network for Harvard Women  
Coalition for a Diverse Harvard  
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 University Muslim Alumni  
Native American Alumni of Harvard University

Thank you for bringing focus and attention to these important topics. Please find my answers below:

1. How important should diversity be at Harvard? What strategies should the University pursue regarding this? (Please discuss specific programs and policies, including Ethnic Studies and faculty hiring, tenure, and advancement, if you can.)

Diversity is fundamental to the mission and values of Harvard University. The mission statements of the twelve degree-granting schools, including Harvard College, reveal many similar themes around transformation through education, creating a diverse and dynamic community, and shaping leaders that will serve the world. Our world is complex, diverse, multi-faceted, and ever-changing. If Harvard is to live up to its mission, the university as a whole—comprised of a diversity of schools and programs—must recruit, admit, matriculate, educate, mentor, inspire, and graduate students and alumni of all backgrounds.

In admissions, Harvard should continue to lead the way in holistic and race-conscious admissions. Applicants are the sum of their personal experiences. The generations of history of their race and ethnicity are an undeniable aspect of the diverse and robust learning environment on campus. Implicit bias training in interviewing and reviewing applications is an important policy for both volunteer interviewers as well as the university itself.

The university should continue to dedicate resources to provide greater access for talented students from all socioeconomic backgrounds, which includes both generous financial aid policies as well as more outreach into diverse communities. Many people are unaware of how accessible an elite Ivy League education can be and might not apply because they assume that they cannot afford it. The Harvard Financial Aid Initiative (HFAI), Harvard Underrepresented Minority Recruitment Program (UMRP),

Underrepresented Minority Fellowships, and similar programs should continue and be expanded.

On campus, Harvard now has strong advising programs including a robust office focused on the First-Year Experience. This is especially important for students who are first generation college attendees, low-income, from underrepresented minority groups, students who self-identify as queer, and those and have limited or no preexisting support network or mentors in higher education. The university should continue to invest in mentorship and advising programs, especially for underrepresented students, by hiring diverse faculty and staff who have professional or personal experiences in these groups.

On that note, I strongly believe that representation and mentorship matter. It has been especially troubling for me, as an alumna who was very involved in the Ethnic Studies Campaign as an undergraduate and has been part of the alumni initiatives to support an Ethnic Studies department, to learn of the recent faculty news. I was dismayed that Professor Lorgia García Peña was not granted tenure in 2019, and previously, in 2018, Professors Natasha Warikoo, Genevieve Clutario, and Ahmed Ragab left the university. In just a little over a year, four professors who specialized in race, ethnicity, or religion left the university.

Many alumni, students, and other academicians have supported these professors. The professors had deep and long-lasting impact in their fields of research, so it is a particular loss to Harvard. More diverse faculty spanning fields that are broadly encompassed in Ethnic Studies should be hired, but Harvard also needs to foster a community and culture of inclusiveness for students as well as faculty and staff. Good faculty hired after exhaustive search should be retained as much as possible. I would even posit that the antiquated legacy of the tenure system, which has its roots in a bygone era, should be reevaluated. Professors should be judged also in part by their impact upon students. What was most concerning to me as an alumna was talking to students who said that some of the professors denied tenure were the only ones they saw who they felt really represented their intellectual, career, and academic interests.

As Harvard's student body, the United States, and the world evolve, academic fields of study and those who research and teach them should reflect that diversity.

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

Harvard's student body shifts and evolves quickly, with each incoming class representing better and better diversity statistics for gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, ethnicity, geography, etc.; however, the alumni body is slower to change from an overall percentage standpoint. This is not to say alumni do not value diverse perspectives—on the contrary, many older alumni that I talk to are very happy with the direction that the university has gone. Men talk about how they were very

happy when co-education was introduced, and athletes agree that randomization of housing was important for bringing different groups of students together.

From the conversations that I have had, I see a few simple ways in which more diverse alumni leadership and activities can be promoted. First, regional Clubs and SIGs should be publicized more centrally, with opt-in beginning even during students' time on campus. There should also be systematic elections and turnover in leadership. Well-intentioned alumni leaders who, either for lack of corporate governance or inertia, have served for many consecutive years will de facto prevent more diverse alumni from taking the helm.

Second, a bottom-up approach to empowering alumni at all levels to contribute would be very useful. That means equipping alumni with the tools to communicate and share content as well as send invitations for events of varying types. Faculty should travel to diverse geographies, including internationally, or local alumni can be empowered to organize their own workshops and talks. And faculty should ideally be as diverse and representative as possible.

Third, Harvard can leverage online engagement tools, including social media, to foster community in more diverse geographies, so that alumni in all reaches of the world can feel connected. After having lived abroad in multiple countries since graduation, my first point of contact is always the local Harvard alumni group. Many alumni abroad feel that they are geographically and socially isolated from their classmates in the US, which is actually a similar feeling expressed by alumni in the US who do not live in New York, San Francisco, Boston, Washington DC, or Los Angeles. But with more nodes of communication and online community, some at least have felt more connected to those with whom they share updates on LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, or WeChat.

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

Given that our world still suffers from systemic and structural inequality, I believe that affirmative action and race-conscious or holistic admissions is important to ensuring the diversity and vibrancy of the intellectual and social community at Harvard as well as fulfilling an important mission for the university. Education is one of the single most important tools for lifting communities out of poverty, creating a more just and equitable society, and enabling higher quality of life for all.

The recent lawsuit highlighted the ways in which affirmative action is still important in our society, even as affirmative action comes under attack by those who seek their own political agendas. I was proud to see so many different alumni and students unite in supporting diversity at Harvard, including the organizations now part of the Coalition for a Diverse Harvard. I am grateful for the leadership and persistence demonstrated by these groups that have upheld race-conscious admissions, while also recognizing that this is a complicated conversation, and discussions must continue to ensure fairness and access to equality for students of all backgrounds. In the spirit of intellectual

freedom and discourse, I am glad that, even among supporters of affirmative action, there are varied views and opinions. I look forward to the continued progress we will make as we continue to reshape and define higher education policy and what diversity means.

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

The world often looks to Harvard for moral and intellectual leadership in many areas, especially as it pertains to educating citizen-leaders. Harvard alumni have incredible privilege and, I believe, great responsibility to create a more equitable, inclusive, and just society.

Harvard's higher education policies set global precedent. Harvard was among the first universities to establish an African and African American Studies Department in 1968, though it has now been surpassed by many other universities with Ethnic Studies departments and/or Asian American, Latinx, or Native American studies. This is something I hope can be remedied in the near future.

I look back on my time in college and am grateful to have learned the skills to think critically, look deeply, and conscientiously object when I felt things needed to change. I attribute many of these learnings not only to the excellent professors, administrators, and staff at the university but also in large part to my diverse classmates. They challenged me to not just look at the world and accept it as it is; but rather, to look at it and push for how it should be.

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 with?

While at Harvard, I was very involved in various student groups, both in leadership roles and simply as an ally, that pertained to race, ethnicity, religion, or identity. I have fond memories of co-hosting events between the Chinese Students Association (CSA) and the Black Students Association (BSA), organizing a policy discussion at the Institute of Politics around race, attending movie nights hosted by the BGLTSA, later the Queer Students Association (QSA), and engaging with late-night conversations in the dining halls with other students from all different walks of life. On the Undergraduate Council, I worked with the Office of Student Life to create more inclusive and diverse spaces and policies for campus life.

I was one of the leaders of the One Harvard initiative, in which many diverse student groups came together to protest racism on campus (a few of us also penned an Op-Ed in The Harvard Crimson to discuss the genesis of the initiative <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2009/3/16/the-writing-on-the-wall-last/>) and was also involved in the Ethnic Studies Campaign. I was honored to have received the Reflections Award for Asian American Leadership as well as the Harvard Foundation Award for Improving Intercultural and Race Relations. After graduating, I became very

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involved in the Harvard Asian American Alumni Alliance (H4A), helping organize the first-ever H4A Summit, and still remain involved.

In the workplace, I have volunteered for or started different affinity groups, taken special care to mentor women and minorities, and have pushed for diversity and inclusion initiatives. Now, with my own company, Alariss Global, the mission is to bring people from advanced, industrial economies to emerging markets so that knowledge, skills, and resources can be shared more equitably around the world. I am proud that we have started to have a positive impact on the lives we touch and the communities with which we work.

Thank you again, to the Coalition for a Diverse Harvard, for the opportunity to share my thoughts on these very important questions.

Best wishes,  
Joyce Y. Zhang AB '09