

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 should be a foundational principle—because human reality is diverse. Embracing diversity affirms the innate value and worth of all people, as it affirms the fact that human progress (let alone institutional progress) is incumbent upon working to restore our social, cultural and political environments to a state of balance and inclusion.

Historically, American institutions have gone to great lengths to defend an unnatural and immoral social and economic hierarchy. The result is pervasive. There is an imbalance of opportunity, a racial wealth gap, and rampant gender and racial bias affecting contexts from policing to standards of beauty. When institutions like Harvard embrace diversity as a foundational principle, what they are doing is helping to move the nation's cultural and moral dial from injustice toward justice. As I see it, this is one of the greatest responsibilities of universities. And it also affords institutions the tremendous opportunity to embrace excellence in all the many places it exists; because excellence of the caliber sought by Harvard and its peer institutions thrives in diversity.

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

Harvard must foreground and celebrate its desire to seek out and retain a diverse, world-class faculty. It must highlight the research they are doing, and foreground their value to the culture at large. Our alumni must be reminded that Harvard's profile as an institution hinges upon the presence and contribution of these and all members of its faculty. A similar emphasis must be made upon the success and contributions of the diverse student body. Because it is not yet universally understood that these stories are central to the narrative of Harvard excellence, that narrative must be deliberately foregrounded in order to educate alumni.

One of the principles informing diverse hiring practices is that when diverse groups of people work together as peers and equals, better outcomes are sought and better decisions are made. I believe this is a valuable guiding principle for the makeup and operation of Harvard's alumni leadership.

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

Affirmative action is a means of restorative justice. It acknowledges the wide-scale and pervasive nature of racial bias in the formation and operation of institutions within America. And it seeks, by concrete and deliberate measures, to correct this bias. The persistence of bias within the fabric of our culture convinces me that Affirmative Action is necessary.

A few years ago, I gave a poetry reading at Rice University to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the admission of black students to the student body. According to its charter, Rice was founded as a Southern institution with the express purpose of educating white men. But now, because of the deliberate effort of its leadership, there is no one demographic that makes up a majority of the student body. I see this as a remarkable moral and intellectual triumph. And, of course, this degree of diversity would never have occurred without recourse to the tenets of affirmative action.

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

Harvard students go on to claim roles of leadership and influence across contexts. The values they absorb from the institution that educates them are critical to their choices after Harvard. And their choices after Harvard have great bearing upon our culture as a whole. Therefore, I believe that Harvard has the responsibility to foreground values of equity, inclusion and justice as its pervasive campus ethos.

Again, I don't see this as a concession, but rather an opportunity. Some of the most rigorous and creative minds, across disciplines, are wrestling to understand the implications of human greed, environmental disregard, emotional trauma and social injustice as these things affect individuals, institutions and our very planet. Working to understand and solve the problems of our time—problems stemming from exclusion, inequity and injustice—is a vital human enterprise.

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?

At Princeton, where I served for four years as Director of the Program in Creative Writing, and where I am now Chair of the Lewis Center for the Arts, I have made concrete efforts to bring about greater diversity and inclusion. My hiring choices within Creative Writing, both in terms of visiting and tenured faculty, brought greater diversity and world class eminence to Princeton's faculty profile.

In 2015, after it was brought to my attention that some of our students were suffering from a climate of exclusion, I initiated several forums for open conversations on the topic of race in the arts. Faculty and staff held space with students, listened to their needs and concerns, and made immediate changes to our practices. With very little effort, we managed to center and measurably improve the experience of students of color and LGBTQ students in our programs. We revisited hiring practices across the Lewis Center, found ways to foster faculty and staff sensitivity training, expanded our curricula, and began to work with our students to foster a climate of greater diversity and inclusion. Our work is in no way done. But at the moment, our student body is more supported, and our programs are more welcoming to students of color—indeed, we now understand that recruiting and retaining students from underrepresented groups is an active process, and one that brings with it extraordinary forms of creativity and manifold worthwhile opportunities.

In my current role, I continue to prioritize the values of diversity and inclusion, and to seek out meaningful ways to foster these values as a prevailing ethos. I've gone to bat to recruit and retain faculty members of color. Currently, I host a series of public conversations with black artists such as Bill T. Jones, Anna Deavere Smith, Lynn Nottage and others. Working together with program directors, I seek to foreground questions of diversity across race, class, gender and ability in our programming and curricula. In short, at every opportunity, I seek to affirm that diversity is inextricably intertwined with excellence.