

**2024 Harvard Board of Overseers Election  
Coalition for a Diverse Harvard  
Questionnaire Responses**

**Theodore D. Chuang**

- 1. How important should diversity, equity, and inclusion be at Harvard, and what strategies should the University pursue to address these? Please discuss specific programs and policies regarding, for example: Ethnic Studies; faculty hiring, tenure, and advancement; the 1650 Charter's pledge to facilitate education of American Indian youth; Harvard's legacy of slavery; environmental justice measures; etc.**

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are important to Harvard, among other reasons, because when students and faculty with diverse viewpoints and experiences are present, are accepted and embraced as part of the community, and have the opportunity share their perspectives with others, everyone benefits from the more robust exchange of ideas.

Harvard has taken some positive steps in recent years, including the commissioning and issuance of the 2022 report on Harvard & the Legacy of Slavery. The recent "cluster hire" of ethnic studies professors, including three Asian American professors who were celebrated at the H4A Global Summit that I attended last October, was also a meaningful step forward. As always, there needs to be follow through and continued progress on these and other initiatives.

As one example, Harvard should continue to move forward in advancing opportunities for students to learn about diverse communities and experiences, both because students should be able to learn about their own communities and because all students benefit from the ability to learn about the full range of communities that continue to contribute to and shape society today and in the future. One of the most impactful parts of my Harvard experience was taking classes relating to a broad range of cultures, philosophies, and traditions, some connected to my family's history and some that were not, which broadened my understanding of the world around me in a way that has had a lasting impact.

Accordingly, Harvard should support and advance programs that enhance the ability of students to engage in research and studies relating to diverse communities, including within the African and African American Studies Department; through environmental justice initiatives across campus such as the Environmental Justice and Equity initiative within the Harvard Law School Environmental and Energy Law Program; and through the Native American Program, the interfaculty initiative that seeks to fulfill the goals of the Harvard Charter of 1650 to educate Native American youth by promoting research and teaching relating to Native American issues.

Harvard should also take steps to support and advance Ethnic Studies, such as expanding course options; establishing a concentration; expanding the ability to include ethnic studies as part of other concentrations, akin to the Ethnic Studies field within the

History & Literature concentration; and increasing opportunities for students to receive credit for such courses as related fields in other concentrations. Such efforts should include a continuing focus on faculty recruitment and hiring in such areas, both from outside Harvard and through the development of faculty within the tenure track.

When students of all backgrounds have the opportunity to learn about the full range of the human experience, whether in relation to their own communities or those of others, they will go out into the world better equipped to be thoughtful, effective leaders and citizens.

**2. Given the Supreme Court’s ruling against race-conscious admissions, what measures should the University adopt to promote student-body diversity along multiple dimensions, including racial diversity?**

For the past half century, Harvard has sought to build a campus community drawing from the full range of diverse backgrounds that make up America and the world, based on the belief that such a community, and the learning and growth that occurs when students live and learn together in such an environment, is critical to preparing students to become effective citizens and leaders once they leave Harvard. With the June 2023 Supreme Court decision in *SFA v. President and Fellows of Harvard College*, Harvard must now identify and pursue a path forward by which it lawfully and fairly builds the kind of diverse community that meets this ideal.

Among the first steps on this path should be renewing Harvard’s commitment to a holistic admissions process, even without consideration of race as a specific factor, under which the evaluation of applicants includes consideration of their full backgrounds, which may include family circumstances, economic limitations, and personal adversity and challenges, all of which impact an applicant’s ability to add to the rich diversity of Harvard. Another important step would be redoubling efforts to engage in recruitment and outreach in communities that do not currently have strong ties and connections to Harvard in order to advance equal opportunity for all potential applicants.

In the near future, Harvard’s leadership should focus significant attention on identifying additional ways by which to fairly and justly enhance the diversity of the Harvard community so that future classes of students can, like I did, benefit from the meaningful exchanges, interactions, and relationships that have been an important part of the Harvard experience.

**3. Do you support the elimination of admissions preferences for recruited athletes, children of donors, and children of alumni (legacy)? Please address all three categories.**

In the light of the recent Supreme Court ruling, it is important, as a matter of fundamental fairness, that Harvard conduct a full review of all aspects of the admissions process, particularly any policies that provide preferences to certain categories of students, to ensure that the admissions process is fair to all. Such a review must necessarily include a close look at preferences for recruited athletes, children of donors,

and children of alumni. Among the questions to be asked are what the stated purposes are for such preferences, whether they are valid, and whether they are being achieved; what impact they have on the diversity of the student body and the equality of opportunity for students of different backgrounds; and whether elimination or modification of such policies would have unintended consequences, such as reduction in opportunities for some members of diverse communities. In achieving a fair admissions process that advances the ideal of a diverse community of students who learn from each other, everything must be on the table, but any decisions should be made only after a full review of all available information, including non-public information, so as to arrive at decisions that are fair and just to all.

**4. In light of recent turmoil—from the doxxing of students to the resignation of President Gay—how do you think Harvard can ensure key institutional values such as: academic independence from political and financial strong-arming; free expression on campus (including the right to protest); and safety for all?**

Recent events have laid bare the challenge that Harvard and all college campuses have been struggling with in recent times: how to foster the free exchange of ideas in a civil and respectful manner that is the essence of an academic community, among students and faculty of diverse backgrounds, while steadfastly protecting the safety and dignity of all community members.

Whether in classrooms, in publications, or in protests, Harvard must protect the ability of faculty and students to express their viewpoints, even if unpopular. Beyond the principle that such exchanges of ideas are a core purpose of universities and academic communities, they provide important opportunities for education and growth for other members of the community. While Harvard should listen to input from outside campus, whether from political leaders, financial donors, or alumni organizations, the viewpoints of the powerful should not be permitted to overwhelm or silence the views of the less powerful. In support of this principle, Harvard should open and nurture channels for the broader Harvard community—including faculty, students, and alumni—to provide input and advice on issues that impact the community. For example, Harvard should seek out greater engagement with alumni organizations such as those connected to the Coalition. In turn, such organizations should endeavor to position themselves in a way that they can accurately convey the collective input of their members to Harvard leadership.

However, to champion and protect academic freedom and free expression is not to allow it to flow without limits, at the expense of the security and dignity of community members. Policies and other forms of boundaries need to be set or re-set so that viewpoints are expressed respectfully, without the targeting, confronting, or intimidating of individuals or groups, and without attempting unfairly to hold members of diverse communities responsible for the actions of individuals, organizations, or nations simply because of perceived connections to them. Members of diverse communities know all too well the experience of being treated as the singular representative of an entire community, and of the tendency for others unfairly to seek to hold someone responsible for the misconduct of others from the same community. Harvard must find a way to

protect its community members from such treatment while still permitting the free exchange of ideas.

Ultimately, Harvard and other universities need to build or re-build a culture of trust, mutual respect, and shared values, under which faculty and students, even while passionately advocating their viewpoints, consider their fellow community members with opposing perspectives to be fellow members of their campus family and fellow travelers on a shared journey seeking the truth, and view their differences in viewpoints and backgrounds as providing opportunities to learn and grow, not threats to their own views. In today's world, there are significant challenges toward achieving such a culture, but if Harvard can provide an example that demonstrates how, in today's world, to build a diverse campus that allows for free expression in a safe and respectful manner, it would provide an invaluable service to the academic community and the world beyond.

**5. What steps have you taken to bring diversity and inclusion to Harvard, to your workplace, and/or to other organizations? Are you a member of any of the signing groups below?**

From the time I was a Harvard student to the present day, I have actively engaged in efforts to advance equal opportunity, diversity, and inclusion in organizations, the legal profession to which belong, and larger society. As a student at Harvard College, I served as a student member of the Harvard College Race Relations Advisory Committee through which I also served on the Planning Committee for a week-long conference on issues of race and diversity known as A.W.A.R.E. (Actively Working Against Racism and Ethnocentrism). Since graduating, I have returned on multiple occasions to campus to speak to and provide advice to students from diverse communities, particularly the Asian Pacific American Law Students Association at Harvard Law School. I am presently a member of the Harvard Asian American Alumni Alliance.

Beyond Harvard, I have served as a trial attorney in the United States Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, a role in which I investigated and litigated civil actions to enforce federal laws prohibiting discrimination the basis of race, national origin, and disability, including in housing, mortgage lending, and public accommodations. Whether by filing suit against apartment complexes discriminating against Black applicants, against a city for blocking the development of a Native American senior center, or against nightclubs for excluding Black and Asian American patrons, I sought through litigation to advance equal opportunity for people of a diverse range of backgrounds.

I have also served on the Boards of Directors of civil rights organizations such as the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law of the Boston Bar Association and the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute; as the Chair of the Board of the Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center, a legal services organization representing low income, limited English proficient Asian immigrants; and as the president or an officer of multiple Asian American bar associations, roles in which I worked closely with leaders of other bar associations serving people of color to advance shared interests. As a Board member of the Conference on Asian Pacific American Leadership in Washington, D.C., I worked

to support, and increase the presence of, Asian Americans serving on congressional staffs and related public sector organizations.

Within my own workplace, at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, I worked with others to establish an Asian American employee group, DHS Asian American Pacific Islander Network (DHS AAPIN), which conducted events and programs to support Asian American employees in the workplace and partnered with similar employee groups representing other diverse communities on issues of mutual interest.

Finally, in my current role, I am an annual speaker at the Robert Wone Judicial Clerkship Conference, sponsored by bar associations of color, at which federal and state judges provide information and advice to Washington, D.C. area law students from diverse backgrounds on opportunities to serve as judicial law clerks.

**6. What role do you think Harvard can and should play in defending democracy in the US and around the world?**

Though Harvard is a private institution, it holds a special place in the academic community, the nation, and the world, the result of which is that its words and actions carry great weight. At a time when democratic norms are facing significant challenges in the United States and abroad, Harvard can be a leader in strengthening democracy in multiple ways.

First, as a nonpartisan, nongovernmental entity with a high profile, Harvard is in a unique position to provide opportunities for bringing together national and world leaders of goodwill, including academic, policymaking, business, and public interest leaders, to find common ground on steps by which to promote and protect democracy, whether through conferences, collaborative publications, or other means.

Second, Harvard can promote and foster research and scholarship among its faculty and students to develop ideas on how to strengthen democratic institutions and enhance trust and confidence in them, including on how to do so in an age in which the diversity of the body politic has changed dramatically, and the media landscape has been profoundly altered by the internet, social media, and artificial intelligence.

Finally and most importantly, Harvard's most powerful tool is the education it provides to its students, through coursework, the activities of student organizations, and the informal exchanges with fellow students, that should instill a deep belief in the need to seek and rely on the truth, to understand and respect different viewpoints and experiences, and to appreciate the need to allow communities to engage in self-governance while also protecting the rights of the disadvantaged and vulnerable. By instilling these values in future leaders in the public and private sectors in the United States and other nations, Harvard can have a lasting impact on the health and vibrancy of democratic institutions everywhere.