

Response to the Diversity Questionnaire for George Alex '81

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.)

If Harvard expects to train the leaders of tomorrow, it must focus critical attention on fostering understanding through respectful interaction and dialog among a diverse student body and faculty. Harvard has long understood that its students learn as much in their daily interactions with one another as they do in formal classroom settings. For that to happen, students need to listen and be heard. It is critical that students develop skills to interact effectively with people who are different from themselves, and that they have the ability to understand, communicate, and effectively interact across cultures, traditions, lifestyles, abilities, beliefs, and values. In today's classrooms, schools and workplaces, resolving conflict often requires awareness of self and of others. Freshman seminars or organic chemistry or any other course Harvard offers must help students develop those skills as a critical component of their education. I believe the establishment of an Ethnic Studies Program at Harvard is necessary and will provide a comprehensive lens on American society, act as a repository for learning, academic inquiry and research, and provide mechanisms of affirmation and inclusion in 21st-century America.

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

It is incumbent on all leaders of the HAA to proactively identify members of diverse groups who can encourage participation of their particular constituencies. This can most effectively be done by leveraging the knowledge of volunteers within each class—identifying those who have the inclination and ability to mobilize their peers to become more involved. Follow up and personal asks to participate are critical. Increasing inclusion and diversity will not happen by mandate or dictum. It will only happen if classmates ask classmates to get involved. Further, to increase engagement, leaders must reach out to alumni to determine activities that appeal to the full range of interests of Harvard alumni and to the specific needs and interests of affinity groups. Then, events that meet those needs must be created and offered.

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

Because a Harvard education can provide a gateway for incredible opportunity and achievement, it is important for Harvard to provide opportunity for historically underrepresented groups through affirmative action and race-conscious admissions policies. More important, a diverse student body will provide all students the opportunity to learn from and accept one another in ways only possible in college. The students can then carry this knowledge into the world to make it more inclusive and just.

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

It is incumbent on Harvard to be a leader both in thought and in action on creating a more equitable, inclusive and just society. By virtue of Harvard's historic impact and influence on academics,

scholarship, business, law, medicine, government et al., Harvard is universally associated with excellence in all areas. As a result, Harvard continues to attract the best and brightest students and faculty; it is important that some of its effort is channeled toward justice, equity, and inclusion. Further, Harvard alumni in their roles across the world should address the systemic inequities in their chosen fields, in their companies, and in their countries and the HAA should help support initiatives that provide tools and resources to our alumni to help make progress in this area. Equity and inclusion are challenges around the world and they transcend race, gender, sexual orientation, country of origin, and culture—Harvard can and should play a vital role in addressing this important issue.

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?

For the past 34 years, I have been highly involved with fundraising efforts on Harvard's behalf. I believe deeply in Harvard's need-blind admission policy and in the School's ability to make a Harvard education available to anyone who is admitted. The benefits of this policy, have provided the financial resources to support Harvard's diversity initiatives. My family history has inspired my efforts in this area. When he was 10 years old, my grandfather emigrated from Greece, coming to this country without knowing the language or the customs. He graduated from Cambridge High and Latin and received a one-year scholarship to become a member of Harvard's class of 1934. Living in the depression era, as the eldest child, he had to leave college in order to help with the family finances. He never had the opportunity to return to complete his Harvard education and although he became a successful and admired businessman, his sacrifice was a personal sadness. I have focused my efforts on fundraising for the Harvard College Fund in support of Harvard's deep commitment to financial aid in his memory. Over the years, we have made tremendous progress so that today's first-generation college students are able to attend Harvard unconstrained by financial ability to pay for all four years.

After spending 30 years working as a volunteer for the Harvard College Fund, I had the opportunity to also join my class reunion committee for my 35th Reunion. During the planning process, I heard from a number of classmates that the high cost of the reunion was a barrier to attendance. To me, it felt wrong that through the Harvard College Fund our class was attempting to make a record-breaking 35th Reunion Gift, yet there was no mechanism to make the reunion affordable for more classmates. As a co-chair of our class fundraising effort and a member of the reunion committee, I had a unique lens, and I realized that our class would benefit from active collaboration and communication between the two organizations—something that hadn't been undertaken historically. With the support and advocacy of the reunion committee chairs and the fundraising committee, we created a unique and unprecedented structure for our reunion that made it more affordable for everyone to attend. Beyond our reunion gift, additional funds were raised to provide scholarships to further defray reunion costs for every classmate, as well as specified funds for classmates who requested additional assistance. The spirit of inclusion and cooperation was contagious. For the first time, all events were undertaken together as a class. The result was a record-breaking class gift and participation as well as a record-breaking number of classmates attending a 35th reunion—most importantly we all had a blast rekindling old friendships and making new acquaintances.