

Luis Ubiñas
Coalition for a Diverse Harvard
January 23, 2023

1. How important should diversity, equity and inclusion be at Harvard, and what strategies should the University pursue to address these? If you can, please discuss specific programs and policies (e.g., Ethnic Studies, faculty hiring, tenure and advancement; Harvard's pledge in its 1650 Charter to actively facilitate the education of American Indian Youth; Harvard's legacy of slavery; environmental justice).

This morning I participated on a panel for a group of corporate directors. In an audience of over 100, there were a few black faces and no Asian, Indigenous, or Latine faces. It was a room filled with the people who hire CEOs, and it was nearly devoid of diversity.

This cannot persist, and it must not persist at Harvard and other institutions which are factories for knowledge and leadership across sectors. Our courts, our legislatures, our art spaces, our nonprofits are often led by people from Harvard and institutions like it. The intellectual backbone of many of those fields is often defined by the research done at Harvard and institutions like it. If Harvard doesn't seed knowledge and leadership pipelines with diverse thought and people, then we have no hope of finding the equity and inclusion we need at the decision-making centers that define our lives.

To achieve that equity, Harvard must be proactive in pursuit of a diverse student body. It must invest in reaching out to diverse communities to find the best applicants, both undergraduate and graduate. In evaluating those applicants, it must factor in their potential, not just their record against other candidates whose applications benefit from the steroidal impact of privilege. And, once those diverse candidates are on campus, Harvard must provide the economic and academic support to allow those candidates equal footing.

The faculty must also reflect the diversity of our nation. As with the student body, Harvard must do better, reach further to recruit a diverse faculty. Once on campus, Harvard must provide funds and other supports for their early research – especially on topics for which there are not traditional streams of external funding. And Harvard must help existing faculty understand the imperative of mentoring and supporting new faculty who may not look or sound like them, who may bring different perspectives, interests and research, who may want graduate students who look different than the graduate students they themselves bring to campus.

While establishing Ethnic Studies programs was a milestone, it should not be a pass that allows the hundreds of other classes to maintain an intellectual status quo. Diversity of knowledge, knowledge production and pedagogy need to be the rule rather than the exception across curricula. Are there Latin American poets in the 20th century poetry classes? African American painters in the contemporary art classes? Are the stories of indigenous peoples, like my

grandmother, being told in social history classes? Are questions of class being dealt with in economics courses? Harvard needs to ensure that throughout its curriculum there isn't just one narrative.

The administration that supports those students and that faculty must also reflect that diversity.

My grandmother once told me that it is hard to move forward if you are in debt to the past; that the weight of the unmet promise, the unpaid debt, would hinder or taint whatever came next. Whether the unmet commitment made to Indigenous people or a debt owed for labor done by enslaved people, Harvard must address its past: fulfilling its recent commitment to rectify its slave legacy and finding a path forward in meeting its 1650 pledge, as other universities that made similar pledges have begun to consider.

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

By any measure, academic, cultural and economic, if it were not for affirmative action, I would not have been admitted to Harvard.

I wasn't just a first-generation college student, I was the first person in my family to graduate from high school; not my mother or father, nor any of my four grandparents had a high school degree. We didn't speak English at home and I certainly wasn't versed in the nuances of privilege. If I had had to pay Harvard anything beyond what work/study provided, I would not have been able to attend. My high school grades were strong, but not at the level of my high school peers whom Harvard did not admit.

I embody why affirmative action matters so much. I graduated from Harvard Magna Cum Laude. I was a Truman Scholar. I helped start an afterschool program in North Cambridge as an undergraduate. I graduated from the Business School a Baker Scholar, the highest academic honor. By any measure, my time at Harvard was a success, but in order for me to have been on the campus at all, Harvard had to look past high school grades and test scores undoubtedly affected by homelessness and the chaos of poverty; cultural questions that must have arisen about someone from the South Bronx, whose mother was a seamstress and whose father suffered and died from alcohol abuse and drug addiction; and, the economic implications of admitting a student with no support possible from home.

Affirmative action, race and class-conscious admissions are pivotal, because without them we fail to look past the structural barriers which hurt diverse candidates. What would my application have looked like if I had had access to breakfast? If I had had a stable place to live and do my school work? If I had the tutoring for tests, counseling and other privileges that so many affluent applicants benefit from? These structural barriers to students' full development are profoundly present today, perhaps even more so. Countless future leaders across fields

need the level playing field that affirmative action provides for candidates who do not benefit from privilege.

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

For Harvard to remain relevant, it must deploy its central capabilities, building knowledge and building leaders, in pursuit of a more equitable, inclusive and just society.

Our society is in the midst of a great reconfiguration. In a few short years 30% of U.S. citizens will be of Latine descent. African Americans and Afro-Descendant immigrants will be another 15% of the population. Asian Americans yet another 10%. More and more LGBTQ Americans are able to be who they are. Harvard must be diverse enough to generate the leaders of these communities as it has generated leaders for centuries.

Harvard has shown that it has the capacity to adapt, embracing people it once rejected. Now is a time when Harvard must once again adapt. Harvard needs to understand that if its lecture halls do not reflect what this country will inevitably look like, then Harvard itself will no longer be as relevant as it has been. If we love the university, then we need to be unequivocal, that diversity is not an option but a necessity, so it can continue to do the things it has done so well for centuries and innovate what hasn't yet been dreamed.

The same can be said of this next generation of faculty. Harvard Business School has *not one* Latine faculty member. When I was first told that, I was in disbelief. The numbers of African American faculty and tenured Asian American faculty are also bleak. I imagine that the College and other graduate schools are similarly staffed. How does the absence of diversity in the faculty affect research? Graduate student selection? Can Harvard remain at the center of intellectual discourse if its faculty is disconnected from the diverse world in which we live?

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?

Every one of us who has benefited from efforts to bring diversity and inclusion to Harvard has the obligation to pay forward that work.

As Chairman of the Statue of Liberty – Ellis Island Foundation, I am currently helping lead a \$100 million project to recenter the National Museum of Immigration at Ellis Island, which receives millions of visitors every year, to tell the full story of the peopling of America. The story of the first Indigenous migrants who crossed the Bering Strait and were the true discoverers of the Americas; the story of people who were not immigrants seeking a better life, but instead taken from their homes against their will and enslaved. The vision for this iteration of the

museum is a commitment to weaving together countless stories from countless countries, the stories of people coming here to build new lives, whether from Nicaragua this morning or Ireland a hundred thirty years ago.

As president of the Ford Foundation, I built a leadership team that was majority female, majority people of color, and inclusive of people who were LGBTQ. I started the Foundation's first LGBTQ rights program with a \$10 million annual budget. As a senior partner at McKinsey, I founded the Latine affinity group. We started with a few of us in a small hotel meeting room; I was recently invited to speak to the group on its 20th anniversary in a vast ballroom filled with people.

At Harvard, I have spoken to Latine groups at the College, Business School and Law School. I spoke to First Generation students in the first year of the group's existence. I have spoken to African American student groups at the College and the Business School. As president of the Ford Foundation, I reconfigured tens of millions of dollars in grants, some decades old, at the Kennedy School and Business School to create a greater focus on social justice issues and new and more diverse faculty.

On a personal level, I have mentored many diverse students and alumni, young people who want nothing more than to live in a just society.

5. If elected, would you be willing to meet occasionally with leaders and/or memberships of the groups below during your tenure?

Of course, this is one of the reasons I am a candidate.