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Coalition for a Diverse Harvard Candidate Questionnaire

- 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.)*

Ensuring a diverse, inclusive, and equitable university should be a primary goal of the Harvard University administration, faculty, and governing boards.

In many ways, Harvard has been a leader in this regard. Our school developed a model of affirmative action that was specifically lauded in the landmark *University of California Regents v. Bakke* case. And some years later, we were one of the first schools that began implementing admissions preferences based on zip code.

At many, many points, though, Harvard has significantly fallen short of these ideals. The school has long struggled with racial, gender, class, and religious discrimination not only in determining its student body, but also in combatting the entrenched biases suffusing its institutions. As a student at Harvard Law School, present during a period of unique tensions and [extraordinary activist energy](#), I saw these inherent biases placed under the microscope. As a member of the Board of Overseers, I would view dismantling these inequalities as a core mission of my tenure—and a barometer against which *all* Board members should be evaluated.

ADMISSIONS

Ensuring a diverse Harvard begins by safeguarding affirmative action. The model at Harvard, its system of using race, ethnicity, zip code, and other factors as “pluses” during the admissions process, is one that has been specifically lauded by the United States Supreme Court. We should fight to ensure that this process is not undermined. I fervently hope that the United States one day overcomes its history and current reality of structural racism—a reality that, as a lawyer focused on transforming the criminal-legal system, I see reflected each day in my work. However, today is not that day. Race-conscious preferences must remain part of the Harvard admissions process.

With this position clear, I believe strongly that the University must go beyond preserving the status quo: Harvard should also substantially increase its commitment to attracting low-income and first-generation students. As a law student, I [researched class-conscious affirmative action](#). I hosted Vassar President Catherine Hill to discuss how she expanded the Vassar Pell grant population. Today, though, [only 16.4% of Harvard students](#) are first-generation college goers. I believe that Harvard should learn from emerging research, including best practices around recruitment and testing requirements, to ensure that its student body reflects a real, genuine commitment to opportunity. And, as part of this process, Harvard should have an open, honest conversation about whether legacy admissions should have a place in the 21st Century.

PEDAGOGY, CURRICULAR OFFERINGS & INSTITUTIONAL DESIGN

If Harvard is going to be a diverse, inclusive, equitable institution, the admissions process is only the beginning: Harvard must ensure that its internal institutions are structured to welcome, support, and appropriately reflect the *entire* student community. Like the other Harvard Forward candidates, I support the creation of an Ethnic Studies department and concentration. You can read our statement [here](#). I know, though, that creating this department is only the beginning: The University should create task forces—task forces inclusive of current students—that would examine how different schools and departments can better support racial minorities, women, first-generation students, current parents, and other groups identified. Inclusion should be baked into the way that *every* department at *every* school conducts its affairs.

As a student at Harvard College and later Harvard Law School, I saw exactly the racial, gender, and class-based bias and discrimination that pervade our University institutions and that spur the need for these task forces. At Harvard Law School, just [over a third of HLS women](#) graduate with Latin honors as compared to [slightly less than two-thirds of HLS men](#). Women are also underrepresented on the prestigious Harvard Law Review. These discrepancies, which persist despite similar LSAT scores and GPAs among matriculating students, demonstrate why all Harvard schools and departments should commit to collecting performance data that is disaggregated by gender. Better understanding what is driving these disparities—such as, for example, [research from Yale Law School](#) about class participation, rates of faculty engagement, or how law school most rewards traits commonly exhibited by men—would help provide a blueprint for offering ideas that would bridge this gap.

Such disparities and institutional issues similarly pertain to race and socioeconomic class. Harvard must do more to rethink not only pedagogy, but also the implicit messages sent by titles and design features. When I was a law student, student advocates [successfully lobbied the HLS administration](#) to abandon a shield that honored a wealthy slave-holding family. And yet, I am currently running for a position that is called an “Overseer.” Harvard must critically consider how such features affect who feels welcome. In addition, Harvard should gather and implement cutting-edge research on how schools, departments, and teachers can better support students who face barriers to success. The work of people like [University of Texas’ David Yeager](#) has shown that simple interventions, including videos that reinforce messages of inclusivity, can dramatically improve the performance of first-generation students. As the task forces identify problem areas across the University, this and similar research should be leveraged to design effective solutions.

HIRING & RETENTION

Pedagogical changes and curricular changes will not succeed if Harvard does not *also* have a diverse faculty. To ensure that this happens, I would promote the following ideas while actively engaging other faculty, student organizations, and alumni to develop additional suggestions.

First, Harvard should broaden its criteria when beginning the search process. While the hiring process is long and should involve a great number of steps, Harvard should expand its initial criteria to ensure that the applicant pool includes individuals who represent the diversity of this world and the Harvard alumni community. In addition, Harvard should identify socially engaged

scholarship and subject areas that are absent from the curriculum, such as Critical Race Theory at the law school, and hire faculty members that specialize in these areas.

Second, Harvard should ensure that student evaluations and mentorship are appropriately evaluated in the hiring and tenure systems. Harvard should remain a world-class research institution, but remaining a world-class research institution coincides with having teachers who are genuinely skilled in student instruction and actively enjoy mentoring students. Appropriately valuing mentorship and teaching, beyond instrumentally benefitting current students, may broaden the individuals who are considered as part of various hiring processes' initial applicant pools.

Third, Harvard should think critically about employees who are not faculty. Everyone working at Harvard—including graduate students (see our full statement on the HGSU-UAW demands [here](#))—should make a living wage and receive the benefits owed to them. The use of private contractors should not undermine this principle. In addition, Harvard should consider additional ways that it can promote inclusive hiring by [affirmatively hiring individuals](#) who face barriers to employment, including individuals who are formerly incarcerated.

Fourth, Harvard should engage students and student groups throughout this process. For example, in law school, student groups offered the administration a list of qualified individuals who could fill various positions with the hope of tackling the diversity-related hiring issues discussed here. Engaging students, who have access to peer networks and different filtering criteria, can help diversify the applicant pool along numerous dimensions.

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

I believe that a more diverse, welcoming institution will produce an alumni body whose active membership better reflects racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and other forms of diversity. However, Harvard should additionally consider the following steps.

FINANCIAL ACCESS TO ALUMNI EVENTS

Harvard should ensure that all mechanisms for alumni involvement—namely events, reunions, and club memberships—are financially accessible. While many Harvard alumni choose to pursue careers that are highly remunerated, we should not make such a decision a requirement for attending alumni events. As of now, reunions can often cost thousands of dollars when transportation, lodging, and program costs are included. For Harvard alumni who are teachers, social workers, or have other careers in public service, this price point may be unaffordable. And at the local level, Harvard Club events also have price tags that can be cost prohibitive to individuals who have pursued public interest or other lower-wage jobs.

DIVERSITY-FOCUSED ALUMNI PROGRAMMING

Harvard should work to ensure that alumni programming is meaningfully tackling issues of diversity, inclusion, and equity. Alongside the incredible events that the Harvard Clubs already host, they could become a site for conversations tackling issues that relate to race, gender, ethnic identity, sexual orientation, religious identification, and other areas of identity. For example,

programs like the Conversation on Race program (discussed below) could become an offering at Harvard Clubs nationwide. Current alumni leaders could offer talks, discussion groups, and other programming that directly speaks to contemporary issues surrounding diversity and inclusion.

RECENT ALUMNI REPRESENTATION

Harvard should reserve six of its 30 Board of Overseers slots for individuals who have graduated Harvard within the last four years. (See our [Harvard Forward platform](#) for details.) This move would ensure that a fifth of the board can offer a different perspective—the perspective of recent graduates—that is currently missing from this governing body. In addition, this move would likely bolster other lines of diversity, including race and gender. Almost every year now, Harvard schools are setting new records for diversity. In 2018, Harvard College set a [new record for racial diversity](#). My Harvard Law School Class of 2016 was the first HLS class to have more women than men. By ensuring recent graduates a voice, Harvard would be creating explicit opportunities for an alumni group that is proportionately more diverse than its predecessors.

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

Please see my answer to #1. I remain firmly committed not only to retaining our existing, race-conscious admissions system, but also to constantly innovating ways that we can push the boundaries of diversity, equity, and inclusion. I would like to see Harvard become a national leader in race-conscious affirmative action *and* in attracting—and supporting—first-generation and low-income students.

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

Perhaps more than any other institution, Harvard plays an extraordinary role in shaping scientific, political, legal, medical, academic, and other leadership across the world. But, as the great sage Spiderman once said, with great power comes great responsibility. If we are going to create so many leaders, we must think critically about how and where they will lead us. This imperative means ensuring that our institution is diverse and inclusive. It *also* means engaging with the following two ideas.

ENGAGEMENT WITH DIVERSITY & INEQUALITY

Harvard should ensure that every one of its students critically engages with the social inequalities that plague our society. Students may draw very different conclusions and they may disagree about what could or should be done. Yet, the process of having these conversations—of speaking candidly, respectfully, and openly with people who hold different views, as well as reading and writing about socially engaged scholarship—is its own extraordinary experience and a necessary part of any quality education in our increasingly cosmopolitan society. By the time that a student graduates, this student should have had the opportunity to be exposed to and engaged with different ideas and viewpoints that have provoked thoughtful reflection about diversity, inclusion, and inequality along multiple dimensions.

EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC INTEREST WORK

At present, Harvard has many features that channel students into lucrative careers that often do not challenge social inequalities. I know these pressures because, twice, I have swam upstream to pursue public interest. But, for many, such choices are not financially practicable. As a member of the Board of Overseers, I would fight to help give all Harvard students the pathways to pursue public interest and related careers.

These efforts to support public interest would build on some amazing initiatives that are currently in operation—and from which I personally benefit. At Harvard Law School, for example, the Low-Income Protection Program allows HLS graduates to receive loan repayment if they take low-income jobs. Harvard Law School additionally guarantees funding for summer internships, allowing HLS students to do public interest-oriented internships during their first and/or second summers. Other Harvard schools should have access to incredible programs like these. In addition, Harvard should think critically about the on-campus recruiting process so that students are not unnecessarily funneled into the private sector. As a member of the Harvard Board of Overseers, I would love to engage current students, faculty, and public interest-oriented institutions across Harvard (e.g., the Phillips Brooks House and the HLS Office of Public Interest Advising) to discuss how the administration can better support their efforts.

RESPONSIBLE INVESTING

Harvard currently has more than \$40 billion in its endowment. This endowment size, not to mention the general stature that Harvard enjoys within the university community, give Harvard a remarkable opportunity to help set new standards surrounding responsible investing. And yet, Harvard has been transparently unwilling to consider divestment requests, including divestment from fossil fuels and the prison-industrial complex.

Students have long been advocating that Harvard make these changes and, overall, adopt a transparent, accountable framework for investing its significant resources. If Harvard wishes to help create a more equitable, just, inclusive society, it should adhere to these requests. It should immediately begin divesting from fossil fuels, using the process [described fully in our Harvard Forward platform](#), and create a new, transparent framework for responsible investing.

The bottom line is this: Our investment dollars are our values. We should not be profiting off of industries whose revenue stems from activities that directly drive climate change or [exploit the predominantly low-income Black and Brown communities](#) disproportionately processed through our criminal-legal system. In my job, I see firsthand the devastation of prison services that charge extortionate rates for basic services and the [basic tools of communication](#) that families need to remain strong. I have seen jails that abolish in-person visiting—the very ability to hug your loved one—once a private company installs a “video call” system and offers kickbacks to local officials. As an alumnus of Harvard, I do not want my school’s dollars flowing to support these companies or any others that are similarly repugnant and ethically unjustifiable.

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?

Both at Harvard and at subsequent jobs, I have helped lead programs that tackle various diversity and inclusion issues. While teaching special education in the South Bronx, I used the amazing

[Teaching Tolerance program](#) to ensure that my students could learn history through an inclusive, equity-oriented lens. While in DC government, I successfully championed a “ban the question” policy to ensure that people’s salary history did not exacerbate the wage gap (*this policy mostly implicates the gender wage gap, but race-based wage differences are implicated to some degree). And while at Harvard Law School, I helped launch a Conversation on Race program with two extraordinary classmates.

This Conversation on Race program began when HLS was grappling with substantial race-related tensions, including the [defacement of Black Harvard Law School professors](#) with black tape. Our program facilitated intimate conversations within small cohorts that represented diverse racial *and* ideological backgrounds. Each conversation involved members of the American Constitution Society (the largest progressive group on campus), the Federalist Society (the largest conservative group on campus), and the Black Law Students Association. Participating students were guided through an original curriculum, designed and facilitated by my two incredible classmates, which gave individuals the tools to have respectful, honest conversations about race and other challenging topics. With our society growing more fractured, antagonistic, and tense by the day, I hope that programs like this one can play some small role in galvanizing the difficult conversations that we desperately need to have.

In my professional life, I have dedicated my career to unmasking and directly confronting structural inequities. I hope that as a member of the Harvard Board of Overseers, I can leverage this experience to help make and *keep* Harvard a leader in fostering diversity, inclusivity, and equity both on campus and far beyond.