

Q and A – Coalition for a Diverse Harvard – Sukhatme

How important should diversity be at Harvard? What strategies should the University pursue to address diversity? (Please discuss specific programs and policies, including Ethnic Studies; faculty hiring, tenure, and advancement; and Harvard's pledge in its 1650 Charter to actively facilitate the education of American Indian youth, if you can.)

Diversity at an institution such as Harvard is critical: its amazing resources, people and brand mark the university as a global leader for positive change and prioritizing diversity sets the right moral tone to the world at large. Harvard has a special role to play at a national and international level, both through its actions and through the voices of its people. Harvard must give a forum for the least heard voices in society, which are often from minority groups. This is one way to address the issue of elitism that is sometimes brought up in the context of the university.

But diversity is not enough. It must be accompanied by equity, inclusion and engagement. And, this must happen at all levels – faculty, staff and learners. A cross-disciplinary Harvard-wide initiative in ethnic studies would be a natural forum to encourage respectful dialogue on many of these issues.

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

This is a tough question that elicits strong feelings on each side. I support affirmative action and race-conscious admissions as a way of recognizing injustices of the past and present and mitigating their effects. However - alongside such efforts - society should double down and press for such policies at early levels of education to the extent possible. Additionally, the goal of all such policies should be to create conditions in the future to obviate their very need. While pursuing such policies, Harvard admissions committees should pay equal attention to socio-economic background – race consciousness is not synonymous with it.

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

Harvard must play a major role on this topic, as exemplified by actions it takes within its walls (from dedicated scholarship on these topics to creation of programs that facilitate civil and open dialogue), to public pronouncements and actions that it takes e.g. divesting from investments in countries which don't support such efforts.

I might add that this issue is personal. The power of education to create a more equitable world was imprinted on me at an early age: an opportunity for my father to obtain an education lifted my family out of poverty, for which I am immensely grateful.

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?

As dean of medicine at Emory University School of Medicine in Atlanta for the last 4 years, my leadership team and I have been most active in the DEI space – locally and nationally. I have supported Emory's entry into the recently formed Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) organized group around DEI. Under my leadership, we have created the position of Chief, Diversity Equity and Inclusion that reports directly to me in the school of medicine. We have year after year broken records for minority admissions to medical school at Emory.

Programs are being undertaken at all levels – learners, staff and faculty. We are addressing issues that range from handling microaggressions, to scholarship on DEI topics, to unconscious bias training in searches. We just had an external review committee evaluation of our many programs. The city of Atlanta has a rich history around diversity and inclusion (or lack thereof) with the legacies of John Lewis, Martin Luther King and others reminding us vividly and inspiring us to action daily on this topic.

I am not a member of any of the signing organizations.

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

Of course, I would be delighted to.