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Candidate for HAA Elected Director
Coalition for a Diverse Harvard Questionnaire Responses | February 2023

The following responses are submitted in my personal capacity. Any views or opinions expressed in these responses are my own and do not necessarily reflect or represent the views or opinions of my employer.

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).

My time at Harvard was a transformative experience, due in large part to the wide range of backgrounds and lived experiences among its students, faculty, and alumni. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are paramount for any educational environment, especially for a world-class institution like Harvard that is dedicated to “the pursuit of truth, knowledge, and a better world.”

The leaders of tomorrow must have a firm understanding of different worldviews and perspectives. As a Harvard College student, I experienced the value of a liberal arts education and especially enjoyed courses about the history and cultures of other regions of the world. The University can continue to expand its course offerings in these areas, not only for undergraduate students but also for graduate students, and provide cross-registration for such courses.

In addition to expanding course offerings regarding history and culture, at the faculty level the University can continue to hire and promote more tenure-track faculty with diverse lived experience and offer more visiting appointments for such faculty to design and teach courses and share their research and scholarship in the broader Harvard community. The increases in total tenured faculty of color from 16 percent in Academic Year 2013 to 22 percent in Academic Year 2023 and tenure-track faculty of color from 30 percent in Academic Year 2013 to 41 percent in Academic Year 2023 are positive developments. The same is true for the percentages of women tenured and tenure-track faculty members, which increased from 24 to 29 percent and 36 to 49 percent for tenured and tenure-track positions, respectively, during this period. These percentages will rise as more women and people of color pursue academic careers.

Furthermore, to address diversity, equity, and inclusion on campus, Harvard College and the 12 graduate and professional schools of the University can provide more financial and logistics support to its student organizations, which are often as diverse and inclusive as the student body but may not always have sufficient resources to achieve their goals and build community. Students and alumni alike would benefit from stronger connections between student organizations and Harvard Alumni Association Special Interest Groups and Clubs.

The University and the Harvard Alumni Association can better facilitate engagement between these groups, including by leveraging technology, so that students can learn about diverse career and leadership opportunities post-graduation. This can be particularly helpful for students from underrepresented backgrounds who may want to learn more about professions to which they have not had as much exposure.

Finally, Harvard can continue to support its Office for Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging by increasing its funding and staffing and expanding the ways in which the Office can coordinate, convene, and partner with stakeholders across the University to achieve “inclusive excellence” and promote an environment where everyone can thrive.

I welcome the opportunity to learn more about specific ideas that the Harvard Alumni Association Board and members of the Coalition for a Diverse Harvard have to make progress in the areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion so that Harvard may maintain its standing as a dynamic and transformative institution of higher learning.

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

As a quasi-judicial official with the State of Illinois Human Rights Commission responsible for resolving cases involving alleged discrimination, I am not able to express my personal views on matters relating to affirmative action and race-conscious admissions.

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

The Harvard community encompasses hundreds of thousands of people in Cambridge, Massachusetts and worldwide. Each of the constituencies of the University has a role to play in creating a society that is more equitable, inclusive, and just. As one of the world’s leading institutions, Harvard can continue to offer unparalleled educational and cultural experiences to its student body in order for students to learn about the history of discrimination and identify ways to remedy the effects caused by unlawful policies and practices. Harvard can also make opportunities available that better prepare its students to lead in any situation and alongside people who may hold different viewpoints and perspectives and find common ground to solve the most pressing challenges.

In addition, Harvard can scale-up resources for students, recent graduates, and other alumni interested in advancing equality of opportunity through careers in nonprofit and community-based organizations. These resources include funding for stipends and fellowships to support these leaders, including people with valuable lived experience and/or limited financial means, to gain firsthand experience in organizations doing impactful work, particularly when these organizations have limited or no funding available for interns or fellows.

Finally, Harvard can continue to educate its community and the world about its complex history, from the 1650 Charter and its pledge to educate American Indian youth to its legacy of slavery. By acknowledging the past and memorializing the lives of people whose labor helped create and develop a world-class institution, the University is taking important steps that can serve as a model for other institutions and entities.

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?

For twenty years, I have dedicated my life to promoting diversity and inclusion. The following are examples of educational and professional experiences that made me a stronger and more effective leader in this area:

Harvard Student Experience: My undergraduate experience at Harvard was critical for forging my identity and becoming a leader. It was by observing leaders of student organizations like Harvard RAZA and Fuerza Latina that I developed a deep understanding of the importance of diversity and inclusion that motivated me to commit my career to serving others. Throughout my college experience, I learned from my classmates and members of these organizations about the different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds that are part of the broader Latina/o/x community. I also understood the importance of recognizing and appreciating differences as well as aspects that members of the Latina/o/x community share in common.

Law School Experience: As a first-year student at Vanderbilt University Law School, I learned that only a small number of students who self-identified as Latina/o/x were enrolled at the school, but the power of community was important for bringing these students together. I applied the experiences I learned at Harvard and became a student leader, reviving Vanderbilt Law School's Latin American Law Student Association and rebranding it as La Alianza, modeled after the Harvard Law School student organization.

In addition, I led at the national level by serving as Chair of the National Latina/o Law Student Association (NLLSA). I remain active with NLLSA by mentoring its leadership and speaking at its Annual Conferences. More than a decade after graduating from law school, the percentage of Latina/o/x lawyers in the United States remains disproportionately low at just under six percent. I want to encourage Latina/o/x law students to continue striving and inspire those who will come after them.

Professional Experience: It is vitally important for students to see people who look like them in positions of leadership. I currently serve as Vice Chair and Commissioner on the State of Illinois Human Rights Commission, whose mission is to promote freedom from discrimination. Previously, I was a Senior Staff Attorney with the Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights, whose mission is to secure racial equity and promote economic opportunity for all. I routinely speak with students and mentor women and people of color.

Earlier in my career, recognizing that a low percentage of people of color were attorneys in the United States, I volunteered to serve on the Associate Diversity Council at the law firm Sidley Austin LLP and mentor women of color with the firm's 1L Diversity Mentorship Program. I assumed a similar position on the Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Board at the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy both as a Student and Alumni Representative.

It was not just my presence on these boards, committees, and councils but also my perspectives and lived experiences from being underrepresented in the legal profession and institutions of higher learning that enabled me to advocate for actionable steps to make diversity and inclusion a reality.

Harvard Alumni Experience: I am a Board Member of the Harvard Club of Chicago (HCC) and lead the Club's Early College Awareness (ECA) Program Committee. ECA is an initiative of the Harvard Alumni Association, and the mission of the HCC's ECA Program Committee is to engage middle and high school students who may not think college is an option or who might be the first in their family to consider attending college.

I also serve as the Vice President of Harvard Alumni for Global Women's Empowerment (GlobalWE), a Special Interest Group of the Harvard Alumni Association dedicated to the empowerment of women through education, dialogue, and connection among individuals working for women's rights and freedoms worldwide. Prior to my election as Vice President, I launched the Connect Initiative and led a team that brought members of the Harvard community together to learn about organizations from countries around the world, including the Global South, that promote the empowerment of women and girls. The GlobalWE Connect Expo attracted hundreds of people across countries and time zones in part because of the different geographic regions represented among the participating organizations.

As a woman and Latina, I understand how having intersectional identities can be powerful in advancing diversity and inclusion. I am a member of the Harvard Latino Alumni Alliance, formerly known as the Harvard Latina/o Alumni National Network, and the Chicago Chapter of the Alumnae-i Network of Harvard Women. I am proud to be part of these organizations, which develop a strong sense of community among their members.

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

Absolutely. I value the efforts and impact of these alumni organizations, and would welcome the opportunity to learn from and work with them to more effectively contribute as an Elected Director.