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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 to address diversity? (Please discuss specific programs and policies, including Ethnic Studies and faculty hiring, tenure, and advancement, if you can.)**

Diversity should be one of the top priorities at Harvard University. My belief systems align with the demands that have been charged to Harvard by students and alumni for nearly 50 years: that Ethnic Studies is critically important for community and scholarship, that collective community input is foundational to the creation of a mindful and up-to-date curriculum, and that foundational and systemic commitment to its success from the university is necessary for their faculty to be successful. I know how critically important it is for students to see themselves reflected in their university of choice throughout their undergraduate and graduate experiences – it's crucial to their success and feelings of belonging in higher education. We cannot admit students of color to the university without also creating robust support networks for them on the other side, which includes fostering a curriculum and classroom environment that reflects their experiences and perspectives.

I see this in my own work as the Director of Native Student Services at the University of South Dakota, as well as in my doctoral research in Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development with a focus in Higher Education and a minor in American Indian Studies. Examining Harvard from an Indigenous perspective and history, I think of Harvard's charter – which committed the institution in writing to "the education of the English & Indian Youth of this Country in knowledge: and godliness" ([Harvard Gazette, 2016](#)). Harvard's original Indian College existed from 1655-1698 and was located where Matthews Hall currently stands in Harvard Yard, yet very few Native people graduated during those years. Caleb Cheeshahteumuck was the first and only Wampanoag graduate until 346 years later when Tiffaney Smalley became the second Wampanoag person to graduate from Harvard College ([Harvard Magazine, 2011](#)). Despite the original commitment found in the charter, it also took until 1971 for any formalized Native program to be founded at Harvard ([The Crimson, 2021](#)). Similarly, alumni and current students today continue to fight for the creation and protection of an Ethnic Studies program.

Even though a large portrait of Cheeshahteumuck hangs in Annenberg Hall, I only learned of his story and Harvard's foundational history with Native people because I was close to

the Harvard Native communities and enrolled in the Nation Building courses about Native communities and sovereign nationhood in the 21st century offered at the Kennedy School. I think about how many freshmen dine below his portrait without understanding who he was and what his nation lost for the creation of this institution. Our communities remember those legacies even though Harvard seems to have forgotten, save that portrait and a small black plaque hidden behind a bike rack in Harvard Yard. As an Indigenous person, I have not forgotten and hope to hold the institution accountable by bringing that perspective to the Board of Overseers. Native people were used as the original fundraising tool for Harvard's endowment, yet the university's commitment to Indigenous communities and communities of color continues to be questioned by organizations like yours and many alumni like me.

One recommendation that I would make in the creation of Ethnic Studies program and in our commitment to our faculty more generally is rethinking tenure pathways that include student and community engagement. This has been one of my own difficulties in examining faculty of color and Indigenous faculty, as their roles often include more than just research and teaching because of students seeing them as mentors, which requires more academic and emotional labor. This mentorship is so important to students, and I wish our tenure processes nationally took this engagement into account during the tenure process review. In particular, the lack of transparency or community input in the way the university carried out its denial of tenure for Lorgia García-Peña, how it responded to community concerns in the aftermath, and how it has conducted its search for a faculty cluster-hire in fields related to Ethnic Studies has clearly broken any trust that existed between student advocates and the administration ([Harvard Ethnic Studies Coalition, 2020](#)). I know that being more intentional about these issues and welcoming student input during the hiring process would protect so many current and future faculty members in departments like Ethnic Studies and American Indian Studies.

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

I fully support affirmative action and race-conscious admissions practices and have actively promoted them through my work in undergraduate admissions and college counseling across many different institutions. I started my career as an Admissions Counselor at the University of Pennsylvania, was a College Relations Program Associate & Special Projects Coordinator at Questbridge, the Manager of School Partnerships at a private test prep company, an Assistant Director of Undergraduate Admissions at Santa Clara University, the Instructor of Native Pathways 3 at CU Boulder's Upward Bound Program, a College Adviser at Albuquerque Academy, and the Associate Director of Enrollment Management at the 7th Gen Summer Program. I've seen the importance of affirmative action and race-conscious admissions firsthand from almost every angle possible, and I continue to see it in my current role as the Director of Native Student Services at the University of South Dakota.

Our American education systems have not adequately supported many students of color in the admissions process, particularly with regard to AP programs or testing preparation, which are often expected in order for students to be admitted to their schools of choice. Need-blind admissions offices, like the ones we have at Harvard, have the ability to truly evaluate from a holistic perspective, evaluating a student based on the circumstances they were presented with. I read thousands of applications during my time in admissions, and that perspective has informed my own work in creating equitable systems for students of color and Indigenous students.

Another important area that must go hand in hand with affirmative action and race-conscious admissions is financial aid access and reform. While this doesn't apply to Harvard specifically due to the need-blind admission and the ability to provide full need for every student admitted, Harvard has a lot of power to speak on behalf of higher education communities that do not have the same endowments or resources. With rising sticker prices across higher education, particularly in the public university system, many of the students I work with are piecing together federal financial aid, loans, and scholarships in order to make ends meet. In order to admit students of color and Indigenous students to our institutions, we have to be able to provide them with enough financial support that allows them to have an experience that does not leave them drowning in debt on the other side. If Harvard used its influence to encourage federal financial aid reform, it would make the entire higher education ecosystem more equitable.

I believe that Harvard has the power to call higher education into these conversations, and we shouldn't be afraid to use Harvard's influence for positive change beyond our own campus. Higher Education looks to Harvard as one of the names to produce research, leadership, and change – yet the institution has not followed in the footsteps of fossil fuel and prison divestment in the same ways as many of its partner institutions. Harvard's ability and responsibility to be a leader is one of the central tenets of the Harvard Forward mission, and it will be a guiding principle for my decisions as a Board member if I am elected. As just one current and extremely important example, Harvard's vigorous defense of our affirmative action practices in court and in the public sphere is exactly how Harvard can take the mantle of leadership in a way that will positively impact higher learning across the country ([Inside Higher Ed, 2020](#)). Again, I personally understand what undergraduate admissions and higher education would look like without affirmative action – in fact, that decision would have ruined my own educational pursuits, career, and passions.

**3. What do you think Harvard's role should be in creating a more equitable, inclusive, and just society? For example, please share any thoughts on divestment from fossil fuels and the prison industry and on the role of the Harvard University Police Department, issues of concern to current students.**

Harvard has the power to contribute to building a just and equitable world, but first it has to grapple with its legacy of creating an education system that has caused harm to many communities by preventing access and opportunity. The institution often glorifies its history without reckoning with the darker elements of its legacy. The university does not realize how intangible and unwelcoming the very idea of “Harvard” feels to so many communities. I rarely bring up that I graduated from Harvard because I have to be careful about the legacy the institution has. While many coastal communities see the university as a badge of honor, Harvard is a sweatshirt name here in South Dakota: it’s not an accolade or a possibility but something entirely intangible and often unheard of. The institution has for centuries upheld systems that have given rise to an inequitable society, to the point that many people here in this country cannot even imagine Harvard as a real place. Having perspectives that understand this reality and having people who are young, hungry, and close to the ground can help the institution begin to see itself as it really exists in the world. This begins with the change of the Board of Overseers name and reexamining the legacy and connection to slaveholders that the term holds. Outdated terms, policies, and histories are why voices like mine are needed in this position.

During my time as a Masters student, the Dakota Access Pipeline fight was happening in North Dakota, on the Standing Rock Indian reservation. While this was of particular importance to me at the time as a tribal member within the Oceti Sakowin, it became even more personal in dating and eventually marrying my husband, a Standing Rock Sioux tribal member. As I watched the news of the pipeline protests and tried to stay focused on being a full-time student, I saw livestreams and photographs of people I knew who were directly impacted by the human side of the fossil fuel industry. Often at the center of environmental issues is the impact on the land, and yet the human connection to land and the importance of community survival are often removed from the conversation.

While the endowment is critically important for investments such as need-based financial aid, we must also hold Harvard accountable for the ethical real-world consequences its investment choices have on society. It’s past time that Harvard puts the well-being of people ahead of the financial interests of the fossil fuel industry. Divestment has an impact that wealthy institutions like Harvard don’t have to witness or live through, and that’s the perspective I hope to bring to the table. I drive by the fields here in South Dakota where the Keystone XL pipeline can be seen on the side of familiar roads, and I know the elders who buried their relatives on the hillsides they wanted to protect, so this issue is deeply personal to me in a way that I doubt is currently represented at the highest levels of the administration.

Examining the prison industrial complex, these issues are actually closely related. Protestors arrested for protecting these sacred sites from oil pipelines benefit the bottom line of those who profit from human incarceration. Just like Harvard should not profit from the fossil fuel industry, they should not profit from the prison-industrial complex. We must reexamine our socially-responsible investment practices to ensure that our endowment, just like our educational priorities, aligns with our values as an institution.

As an administrator in Student Services, my most important role is in listening to students. When it comes to issues such as relationships with HUPD or other systems of colonial and oppressive power, I want to hear what they have to say as undergraduates. As I often tell my students, they are the experts, grappling with these issues during a global pandemic. They are living in an era that I will never understand as an undergraduate, so it is critical for me to listen to what they have to say. I will always center this in my work, and I am ready to engage with current students and alumni who are connected to campus to have a stronger understanding of relationships between Black and brown students and the police.

**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?**

As an undergraduate at the University of Pennsylvania, I was the co-chair of Natives at Penn and the James Brister Society Association of Native Alumni Student Leadership Award recipient in 2011. We revived the student organization to focus on recruitment and retention efforts on behalf of the university. During my time in the Higher Education Masters program at Harvard, I was a HGSE Equity & Inclusion Fellow, served on the Dean's Advisory Committee for Equity and Diversity, and co-chaired FIERCE: Future Indigenous Educators Resisting Colonial Education. I also worked as a Graduate Assistant in two positions: at the Harvard University Native American Program Office and in the Office of Student Life. I was also the Student Convocation Speaker, received the Student Convocation Speaker Award, and received the Intellectual Contribution Award for the Higher Education Cohort. At the University of Minnesota, where I am currently a doctoral student (remotely since the beginning of the global pandemic), I received the Diversity of Views and Experiences (DOVE) Fellowship in my first year, and was a Ford Fellowship honorable mention and alternate.

In every position I have held, I have served on an equity and inclusion committee or advised and mentored students of color and Indigenous students. I've experienced this as an admissions counselor traveling across the country and visiting different students, starting leadership groups on campus as a mentor, and challenging institutions to think about their legacy in Indigenous experiences in this country. As a Native student and mentor specifically, I have worked to push institutions to value Indigenous student experiences on campuses. At Penn, I was

on the student leadership team that started the first wacipi (powwow) that recently celebrated its tenth year. At Santa Clara University, we started the first ever Native American student group in the institution's entire history. At the University of South Dakota, we've just created the first Living Learning Community in housing specifically for Native students. These are just a few examples of the impact I hope my work will continue to have on higher education for the generations who choose to attend.

In 2015, I launched [NativesInAmerica.com](http://NativesInAmerica.com) (Natives In America), which is a Native youth collaboration that focuses on serving Indigenous high school and college youth. Our mission is to provide a safe online space dedicated to Native youth writing pieces about contemporary issues and their understandings of Indigeneity. Since we've launched, we have expanded to thirty writers, been featured on MTV, and have lived on as an opportunity for educators and community members to read about experiences that Native people define for themselves. Moreover, in my role as Director of Native Student Services, my current position is to serve Native students in their transition to college. This year in particular has presented tremendous challenges in creating community, supporting student mental health, and facing financial challenges.

While I wish D&I efforts were foundational to all institutions of higher education, I've also been willing to do the slow and committed work to see change happen for future generations who choose our institutions. I understand that Higher Education won't change unless a committed team or network is willing to ask questions and put themselves on the line. Generations of Indigenous and communities of color have been willing to make those small changes happen in order to see large changes happen in the future. The Native people of the original Indian College were the first. They could not know that, in 2017, I would have the opportunity to deliver the Convocation Speech for the Graduate School of Education, but they believed that future students were coming. I hope in my work to do the same for generations ahead.

**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 am very community-centered in my work, and I would love to get to know the Coalition team. I believe in inclusive governance and hope to be able to connect to hear the concerns of the Coalition members. I feel that CDH's interests and hopes for the university align both with my personal values and with Harvard Forward's mission, and I hope that my work and leadership demonstrates that as well.