



COALITION FOR A DIVERSE HARVARD

December 13, 2019

Dear Coalition for a Diverse Harvard members,

With heavy hearts, we report to you on the Ethnic Studies crisis now unfolding.

In June, we celebrated FAS Dean Gay's [commitment](#) to hire a cluster of four Ethnic Studies scholars who would build a concentration and program. A faculty search committee was formed, including renowned Ethnic Studies scholar Lorgia García Peña. In her seven years at Harvard, Prof. García Peña won awards for her scholarship and teaching, served as an academic mentor to countless undergrads and grad students, and played a key role in the expansion of Harvard's woefully inadequate Ethnic Studies offerings.

The day before Thanksgiving, Prof. García Peña learned that Harvard had denied her tenure. We now understand that she was moved forward in the tenure process by her department colleagues and by FAS -- but then denied tenure following an ad hoc review initiated by Pres. Bacow and overseen by Provost Garber. Harvard's decision drew immediate outrage on campus and across the country and has been covered by the *Boston Globe*, *Newsweek*, and *NBC*, among others (links below).

A chronology of the past 10 days:

- 53 Harvard student and alumni organizations (including Diverse Harvard) and hundreds of individuals **condemned the tenure denial** in a **letter to Harvard administrators**. The [letter](#) reviews Prof. García Peña's stellar qualifications, notes that Harvard has forced out or lost several important Ethnic Studies scholars in the past year, and outlines racist harassment recently experienced by Latinx faculty and students. It points out the hypocrisy of University administrators claiming they are invested in Ethnic Studies while simultaneously denying tenure to a leading Latinx and Ethnic Studies scholar. Eight demands are laid out, including the granting of tenure to Prof. García Peña, the establishment of an Ethnic Studies department, the recruitment and retention of Ethnic Studies faculty and faculty of color, and increased transparency in the tenure process.
- On Dec. 2, the Monday after Thanksgiving break, some 50 students staged a **sit-in at University Hall** to press these demands. The [sit-in](#) lasted 48 minutes to symbolize the [48 years](#) that Harvard students and alumni have been lobbying for Ethnic Studies.



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- On Tuesday, Dec. 3, dozens of students again raised their demands at a protest at a **Faculty Meeting**. Some [faculty members](#) said they shared the students' heartbreak and outrage.



- On Thursday, hundreds of students [protested](#) the tenure denial on the **Widener Library** steps, joining forces with striking members of the Harvard Graduate Student Union.



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Photos: Fernanda Baron

- The following day, members of the Harvard Ethnic Studies Coalition joined Divest Harvard, (which seeks fossil fuel divestment), HGSU, and the Harvard Prison Divestment Campaign at a **rally in Harvard Yard**.
- On Monday, Dec. 9, students **occupied the office of Provost Garber** for 48 minutes.
- Yesterday, dozens of students took over the Admissions Office for several hours on the day that early admissions decisions went out, chanting, “Want diversity? Teach our Histories” and “No Peña No Peace”. Students, who have demonstrated all through reading and exam periods, have [vowed](#) to continue their protests after the winter break.

Support for Prof. García Peña and for the students’ demands has been fierce and wide:

- **Nine Harvard FAS ladder faculty in Asian American Studies, Latinx Studies, and Native American Studies**, and the leaders of the programs that support Ethnic and Indigenous Studies research and teaching signed a powerful [open letter](#) noting the



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“severe repercussions” that Prof. García Peña’s tenure denial has on their efforts – especially given their small numbers – to address growing demand for Ethnic Studies courses and advising, to recruit and retain top faculty, and to participate in Harvard’s mission of fostering diversity, inclusion, and excellence. Please read the full [letter](#), which outlines the history and basis of Ethnic Studies. Highlights here:

- Ethnic Studies is “concerned primarily not with individual identity, but with knowledge: with how it is produced, naturalized, marginalized, challenged, and deployed, and thus with questions that should be at the center of every academic institution. Yet because such work necessarily critiques given categories of existing knowledge, fostering research and teaching in these fields has required a willingness to reimagine the intellectual architecture of the university.”
 - While other peer institutions have begun devoting considerable energy and resources to building Ethnic Studies, Ethnic Studies at Harvard has long been misunderstood and dismissed, and faculty and administrators have not been afforded the respect and resources given to other areas of study.
 - “It is difficult to imagine what Latinx studies will look like at the university without [Prof. García Peña’s] esteemed scholarship, teaching, and mentorship. As we turn, painfully, to that future, we find that we are still reiterating the same requests that ethnic and indigenous studies advocates have made for half a century: faculty, a secure institutional home, and resources to sustain both.”
- Nearly **5,000 graduate students and concerned scholars** from around the country signed a [petition](#) of support, writing:

“This denial strikes us as a disavowal of Harvard’s recent commitment to invest in Ethnic Studies. Denying tenure to a faculty member of color who is actively serving on the committee for new hires in Ethnic Studies undermines Harvard’s commitment and betrays efforts to advance diversity and inclusion at this institution.”

- More than **200 internationally renowned scholars**—including bell hooks, Angela Davis, and Lisa Lowe—[wrote](#) to Pres. Bacow earlier this week:

“[W]e write as senior scholars of Latinx and Latin American Studies, Caribbean Studies, Dominican Studies, Ethnic Studies, Women’s and Gender Studies, African American and Black Studies, and American Studies. . . . This [tenure denial] signals that the University is ill-equipped to evaluate the depth, breadth, and import of these fields of scholarship from one of its most brilliant and nationally-recognized practitioners. [W]e find this decision shocking . . . in its refusal to recognize the invaluable contributions of this type of work to the larger academic community.”



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On Tuesday, **Dean Gay** sent a [message to the FAS community](#), which she forwarded to Diverse Harvard, expressing strong support for Ethnic Studies and explaining her position that it is through the hiring of faculty that an Ethnic Studies program must be built. She welcomes a new concentration in ethnicity, migration, and indigeneity, if “faculty (and not deans)” spearhead this effort and win approval of the full FAS. She further stated:

“I am asking that together we send the unambiguous message that the Faculty of Arts and Sciences is ready to embrace ethnic studies and to support faculty and students as they create the strongest and most successful program of its kind in the nation.”

On Wednesday, Diverse Harvard [responded](#) to Dean Gay:

- We cannot put our faith entirely in the hiring of faculty since faculty can so easily be disregarded, as with Prof. García Peña’s tenure denial.
- We are alarmed about whether the search committee’s charge addresses the core academic underpinnings of Ethnic Studies.
- The four future hires only begin to fill the hole created by the recent loss of esteemed Ethnic Studies scholars, in a climate where additional departures are of increasing concern.
- We urge Harvard to (1) hire four *senior, tenured* Ethnic Studies scholars whose responsibilities will include building an Ethnic Studies structure, (2) provide proper resources, and (3) reverse the García Peña tenure denial.

We further [wrote](#) to President Bacow expressing support for the student protesters and faculty and asking him to join Dean Gay in committing to creating the strongest and most successful Ethnic Studies program in the nation. We noted that the students and alumni who have most strongly defended race-conscious admissions, some testifying in court, are the same students and alumni who are fighting fiercely for Ethnic Studies – because those who have been exposed to Ethnic Studies have learned about historic, systemic inequities in our society.

At this critical juncture, the Diverse Harvard board welcomes your ideas about additional ways to support the Ethnic Studies campaign. You can email us at harvardcoalition@gmail.com.

Harvard can turn this around. We fervently hope it does.

SUPPORT the HARVARD GRADUATE STUDENT UNION (HGSU)

After 18 months of fruitless bargaining, Harvard grad students [struck](#) on December 3, and the strike continues with broad support. Administrators are making themselves available for bargaining, for the first time since the strike began, for only three hours on 12/18. Diverse Harvard stands with the teaching and research assistants in their calls for fair pay, expanded



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health care, and third-party protection against discrimination and harassment—all of which is vital to creating and supporting a diverse and inclusive campus. Please contact Harvard administrators by phone or using the email [templates on the HGSU website](#) (again, if you have already written), join the [picket lines](#), and contribute to the [strike hardship fund](#)! To get information about the strike and where to picket, drop by HGSU's headquarters in the Phillips Brooks House basement. HGSU's website and social media are [Facebook](#) | [@hgsuuaw on Twitter](#) | [www.harvardgradunion.org](#) | [hgsu.general@gmail.com](#) | [hgsuuaw@insta](#) .

DONATE TO DIVERSE HARVARD

Finally, in these challenging times, make Diverse Harvard part of your end-of-year giving by making a donation on our [website](#) or on [Facebook](#). Please let us know you stand with us in the long fight for diversity in higher education. Donations made by the end of 2019 will be matched up to \$5,000! Your support will make a difference as we enter our 5th year.

Best,

Jane, Margaret, Jeannie, Kristin & Michael

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