**Conversations on Race discussion series**

**Transcript for Friday 28 May 2021**

**Dr Dr Rebecca Surender Surender, Co-Chair of the Race Equality Task Force and**

**Dean Dean Claudine Gay Gay, Edgerley Family Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and Wilbur A. Cowett Professor of Government and of African and African-American Studies, Harvard University**

Dr Rebecca Surender: As part of its work the Task Force is seeking to learn about the experiences of other institutions within the higher education sector, what are some of the strategic approaches, difficulties they have encountered in driving institutional change and how can that inform what we're doing at Oxford. This series is part of that effort, discussions with key individuals who have led, or indeed are still leading successful transformation within their own organisations, and I'm really delighted to introduce Professor Dean Claudine Gay Gay as our guest today.

She is the family Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and the Wilbur A. Cowett Professor of Government of African and African-American studies at Harvard University. Dean Claudine Gay began her studies as a political scientist at Stanford University before coming a Professor of Government and African-American studies. Her scholarship encompasses political attitudes and behaviours of minority voters and office holders with a particular focus on African-American communities and populations. She is the founding chair of the Inequality in America initiative, a multi-disciplinary effort launched in 2017 and she's held numerous roles at Harvard, including being appointed Dean of the Social Science faculty between 2015 and 18. She assumed the leadership of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, the largest of Harvard's 12 faculties in August 2018.

Dean Claudine Gay, a very warm welcome. Thank you so much for making time to participate in this important discussion that we are having in Oxford. I realise it's about 8am in Boston right now, so double thanks for that. We have only had a few minutes to sketch out the bare bones of your trajectory and I wonder if I could ask you to begin by telling us more about your own professional academic background. Why did you choose political science?

Dean Claudine Gay: The answer to that requires me to start with my family story a bit. First of all thank you for inviting me, I don't want to miss the opportunity to thank you for that. I am excited to be part of this conversation. So my parents are both immigrants from Haiti, they immigrated to the United States, to New York in particular, in the late 1960s. They eventually both earned college degrees and always held similar expectations for me and for my brother. But their view of college was one that expected a pretty tight relationship between your educational choices, whether your college major for example, and your job intentions. And so courses of study that were not obviously linked to particular careers at best mystified them, and at worst worried them greatly. It took a fair amount of work to move beyond that way of thinking and really embraced potential of liberal arts education, which is what I did when I began my undergraduate career at Stanford and to go on to graduate school to pursue my love, which is the study of politics. And I wouldn't say I ignored my parents' wishes. I defer to them on a variety of issues because they were my number one fans but with support and encouragement of a couple of key faculty members I began to work with, I carved out some independent intellectual space for myself.

That opened up so many opportunities for me that I wouldn't have experienced otherwise. And that's ultimately what led me to Harvard where I earned my PhD in political science in the department that is called Government and as you mentioned I began my faculty career back at Stanford where I taught for six years in political science. And my particular area of study is on topics of minority politics and the intersection of race and politics and what's always fascinated me is really just the political beliefs and political behaviour of ordinary people, why people choose to engage in politics, why is it that people who have so much at stake in politics and political outcomes participate so little. Those are the kinds of questions that have interested me really throughout my career and again, I began my career at Stanford and eventually came to Harvard as a tenure faculty member in 2006.

It was a bit of a homecoming. When I moved into my office, I realised that my dissertation adviser was in the office next to mine and another member of my committee was one floor down. So that was a bit odd. But also made Harvard feel like home really from the beginning. And then as you mentioned, in 2015 I stepped out of an ordinary faculty role and took my first administrative leadership position as Dean of Social Science and became FAS Dean.

Dr Rebecca Surender: For UK audiences, can you tell us what the FAS is, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, what is your role as Dean comprise.

Dean Claudine Gay: The Faculty of Arts and Sciences is one of 12 schools at Harvard. It is the largest of the schools. It includes Harvard college, which is the undergraduate programme, and there are 6700 undergraduates in the college.

Includes the graduate school of Arts and Sciences which awards the PhD, that's another 45-4600 students. It also includes the division for continuing education, which targets part-time adult learners. We have another 3,000 or so students who earn degrees through that programme. As well as a number of students in the tens of thousands who take courses. It includes the school for engineering and applied sciences as well as social sciences and arts and humanities. All the faculties who sit in those academic areas of Harvard, a total of 730 latter faculty, faculty who hold tenured appointments or tenure track appointments. 500 faculty who are in term limited teaching appointments. The FAS is also home to a number of museums, such as the home of the Harvard college libraries, one of the largest private library systems in the United States. And a number of centres and institutes, as well Harvard athletics. All tolled, it represents over 40% and nearly 50% of the entire university. So that's what I oversee. I would say with respect to this conversation, the university as a whole really embraces an institutional commitment to advance our mission on a foundation of inclusive excellence and so I see a big part of my role really being to inspire and enable members of our community to deliver on that commitment in their everyday work. It is a commitment that should be how we recruit faculty and staff and how we teach and support our students and obviously just how we interact with one another on a daily basis, particularly across lines of difference and across all those hierarchies that are endemic in the academy. So really I try to work to create the conditions that support the collective pursuit of inclusive excellence.

Dr Rebecca Surender: We're going to come to several of those points I'm sure in the course of this hour. You took up this huge role a year-and-a-half or so before the Black Lives Matter movement really swept the United States and the whole globe, including institutions of higher education. How did the Black Lives Matter movement impact Harvard?

Dean Claudine Gay: So the world is awake to inequality and systemic racism and anti-black racism in particular, really like never before, and perhaps unlike in previous movements, certainly the way it is manifesting in the US is that it's prompted a level of intro specs and soul-searching that seems unprecedented.

Institutions and universities looking at themselves and at the conscious and unconscious ways that they actively reinforce inequality. And our campus has been no exception there. While it's true some of the physical manifestations that one would ordinarily see at a time like this have not been present because we have had so few students on campus, nonetheless the debate and the demands have been quite intense. Because the last year really has brought to the fore how race has lived on our campus. Really tough and searching discussions about the academic experience for our students in terms of who is at the front of the classroom, what's represented in the syllabus, faculty who are speaking openly and in quite wrenching terms about the isolation of being the only person of colour in their department. And what often comes with that, the service burden that they feel is neither recognised nor rewarded.

Graduate students who have been speaking about lack of mentorship, few role models, direct experiences with harassment from PIs and faculty advisers, everyone complaining and general impatience and frustration with all sorts of traditions and cultural practices that feel clubby and alienating and elitist. Staff complaining about too few leadership opportunities. Really just everything has come to the surface and has been laid bare because people, I think rightfully so, feel emboldened now to speak frankly about their experience.

And while it's challenging, it's also feels like a real moment of opportunity. Again, it is a variety of issues, all of which are probably manifesting on your campus as well. I am sure nothing of what I have said sounds unique. Harvard can do better. And you know whatever progress we've made in representational diversity, and there has been real progress, our undergraduate student body is remarkably diverse, we have yet to create conditions where every member of our community feels seen and heard and respected and able to thrive and contribute. So that means it's as an institution we're not realising the full potential that's really embodied in this community. So that's brought really new urgency to work, that was already under way, things I have long been committed to and even my predecessor was committed to, but now there's just much more momentum behind them.

Dr Rebecca Surender: I don't know whether it feels reassuring or disappointing so much of what you said resonates with us here at Oxford. Given the big canvas you have just outlined, and demands and pressures coming from all constituencies in the institution, what are some of the key priorities for Harvard and for FAS right now?

Dean Claudine Gay: So I would say that the agenda that's - not emerged, but gained this new urgency has included a combination of some new resources that we have put in place, particularly around building capacity to deliver on inclusive excellence. That together with some initiatives that we've set in motion to really change the facts on the ground. So on the capacity building side, I have appointed for the first time a Chief Diversity Officer for the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, someone who can really help us to articulate a strategic vision for diversity and inclusion, and translate what really have been a whole variety of nonetheless ad hoc efforts, and actually put them together under a more strategic umbrella. Also on the capacity building side, I have appointed a trio of tenured faculty members who care deeply about these issues, but they are not subject matter experts, but visit departments to share ideas and best practices and work with them on efforts to enhance faculty diversity.

One of the initiatives that we have launched that I am particularly excited about is a task force on visual culture and signage, which is exploring the issue of how we memorialise events and individuals and moments in our institutional history. We're also actively working to amplify our teaching and research on racial ethnic inequality through strategic faculty hires as well as pipeline programmes. So there are a few different things that we're working on. And since part of what we're hearing is that the challenges are not just experienced by faculty and students, but also staff, we've also launched a study of staff hiring, retention and development, and that's really focussed in particular on understanding and addressing the dearth of staff of colour in senior staff positions in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. On some dimensions our staff are quite diverse, but as you move up the salary grade, as you move up the decision-making authority and responsibility ladder, it becomes less and less diverse. Frankly, at the highest level of our staff, it's even less diverse than our faculty, which at Harvard is hard to believe. But we've managed to achieve that as well. So those are some of the things that we have set in motion and are seeking to advance right now.

Dr Rebecca Surender: It would be great to hear about all these initiatives in more detail. Let me pick up on just a couple if I may. In terms of capacity building and recruiting, when I was doing my homework for the interview and reading a little bit about what Harvard was doing, I came across something that you call cluster hiring. Can you talk about that a little bit?

Dean Claudine Gay: Yes, I will talk about it through an example. So one of the things that we are pursuing right now is an effort to really increase the representation in our teaching and research of work on ethnicity and migration.

With a particular focus on Asian American studies, Latinx studies as well as areas around Native American studies where that was one area where we had already made progress over the last few years. And recognising as faculty that we want to recruit, want to feel like they are coming into an intellectually vibrant somewhat cohesive community and are not going to be the lone person working in an area.

One of the things we launched and actually this pre-dated the pandemic and had to briefly be suspended before resuming online, is a search for four senior faculty in the broad area of ethnicity and migration, and this is a search where we literally cast the broadest possible net, we were open to looking at scholars who were both early career scholars as well as more senior scholars, working in areas of Asian American studies, Islam in America, and we put together a faculty search committee that included humanists and social scientists that are all generally interested in topics that relate to the study of these diaspora communities. And right now we are at a stage in the process where we are pursuing for faculty, two of them are historians, one focuses on Asian American studies, the other on Latinx studies as well as a sociologist and a political scientists who focuses on Asian American studies. But still faculty recruitment takes time and I'm optimistic that we will be able to attract them to Harvard. These are all quite senior scholars and part of my confidence comes from the fact that they are excited to be part of a group of people and know that they are going to step into an intellectually vibrant space.

They are also encouraged by the signal it sends about our institutional commitment to invest in this area. In addition to this cluster hiring, recognising that it takes time, it could be another year before there are any boots on the ground. With respect to these hires, I also established a new visiting Professorship on ethnicity and migration to invite to Harvard up to two senior scholars who would like to spend a year visiting, working with our students, engaged in their own research but also teaching in our curriculum and we have the first of those visiting Professors who will be joining us as a scholar of south Asian studies, who will be joining us in the Fall.

Dr Rebecca Surender: You mentioned resourcing here, it's a visible reflection of commitment and the words. It helps if you are a well-resourced institution. But ultimately, resources matter, and how do you, and say as...

Dean Claudine Gay: So yes, resources are absolutely critical. The institution runs on money. That's just a fact. But in order to advance these faculty hires, I chose not to hire in other areas. So this was redirecting resources that might have gone to faculty recruitments in other parts of the FAS, so we could have a focussed effort in this area. Because at the end of the day, the project of building a truly inclusive community begins with what we consider worthy of research and teaching. What better way to signal that than to be prepared to say, you know what, rather than get another hire in perhaps some other field of political science, or in neuroscience, or in quantum physics, this is important, too.

Actually, a full account of contemporary American society demands scholarship that affirms and recognises the relevance of diverse cultural backgrounds and history, that part of preparing our students to lead in a globalised yet profoundly unequal society means they actually need this education, and right now we are absolutely falling short in ways that our students have pointed out. For frankly 40 years, there's been mobilisation and activism around the lack of attention to issues of ethnicity and migration. It's not for lack of scholarship. There may not be a dime a dozen worth of scholars who would be suitable for Harvard, but there are many, many scholars doing incredibly important work in this area and they should be here.

Dr Rebecca Surender: Tough choices have to be made. These are choices.

Dean Claudine Gay: Yes.

Dr Rebecca Surender: Can I just ask you to elaborate on your...you touched on a new task force on visual signage I think. Institutional culture. It's something that's very relevant for us here at Oxford for all the reasons you will be aware. What are you doing?

Dean Claudine Gay: Yes, so this work really merges from the recognition of that how and where we memorialise individuals and events can have a really profound effect on how each one of us experiences the physical campus and our place in it. The portraits on our walls, the sculptures in the court yards, the plaques on buildings, the signs on walkways, all of that projects a sense of who we are, where we've been, of who has contributed to our community in ways we value and so how we tell the story of our past and present, which is sorely lacking, the story of our present, and our future through symbols and images that surround us is really an important dimension of building again a truly inclusive campus community. And this is something that faculty and students and staff have been saying for years. So with that in mind, the task force was charged with first just conducting a comprehensive survey of the current FAS visual landscape, and articulating a set of principles and informed guidelines for how we could involve a more inclusive imagery across the school. I have also asked them to identify some particular spaces that could be priority opportunities and really good candidates for immediate intervention. I have to say that when I added that to their charge, it's like eyes lit up, because there there are some iconic spaces that are long overdue for make-overs.

So this group is empowered to identify those spaces and propose ways that we can evolve them. One of the principles that they have seized on as a group - and they haven't reported out on yet, I am expecting the report in June - one of the principles they have seized on is the idea of dynamism and that's become central to the approach that they are developing. Because they would like to get us away from the notion that once something goes up on the wall, that has to stay there forever.

And instead take a much more dynamic approach to the curation of our campus spaces. Where things are in more active circulation and where there might be very frequent moments when spaces are refreshed and reimagined. This would be a huge and I think very important cultural shift for us. We're not there right now. Getting to a place where our community doesn't view every decision as static or as commitments that future generations will have to live with forever. I mean that unburdened us from that, just opens up so many possibilities.

And also one of the things that the committee which includes faculty, students and staff, that they are excited about is actually making room for creativity, and frankly of more exciting visual culture in our spaces. So that is the nature of their work. One of the central problems they have identified and, maybe this is unique to Harvard, where it's not only decentralised, it's decentralised, plus opaque, nobody knows, there are a thousand veto points across the university but one of the problems they have identified, which I am hopeful that their report is going to address in terms of providing some suggestion, is the issue of jurisdiction, and local agency.

So a major road block to change as it turns out has been a lack of clarity around who controls spaces, who gets to decide, what should be the procedures we need to follow if there is a unit, a department that wants to make changes to a space that is from their perspective uniquely and locally owned by the department. Are they empowered to take portraits off the wall? Because at the end of the day, if we want dynamism, our culture and our structures actually have to support that goal. It's clear that we just have to provide a mechanism for our community to bring forward some proposed visual changes and have a way to actually enact them. So there is a lot of local energy to do this work. But it's really been prevented from happening because no-one knows who is actually empowered to make change.

Dr Rebecca Surender: Have you had very much push back and challenge to this?

Dean Claudine Gay: They have yet to roll out the recommendations. I should say this is an effort that's being led by the Dean of Arts and Humanities, but it's an enormous task force that has representation from every constituency, and a big part of their work and it began in September, has involved extensive outreach and consultation. So they have gone, honestly, door-to-door to door to solicit ideas, hear the challenges and that's helping them to define what are the principles, what are the guidelines. They haven't got to a point where they have identified what I'm assuming is going to be the case, that the faculty room where we convene for faculty meetings needs to be addressed. The hall where the first year students take their meals, another place, they haven't put those words on paper but I anticipate that's what's coming. And then we might expect - there could be push back in some quarters. But again, focussing on this notion of dynamism, I think that does open up opportunities. If we consider this that we're not contemplating making a decision for generations to come, but finding a way to, in a way that feels fresh and relevant for this generation, a way of acknowledging and celebrating our past, but also signalling its kind of future that we're trying to build toward. I'm hopeful that the community will be open to this.

Dr Rebecca Surender: I know that that's going to be of interest, we may get some questions about it later on. Just one other thing to pick up on on the various initiatives you began with, there were so many, and something I mentioned in my introduction, the Inequality in America initiative. This was something you...

Dean Claudine Gay: Yes, that has been something that pre-dates this moment of heightened awareness by several years, but it was part of a recognition that inequality is a central challenge, is one that we as an institution need to be engaged with in a much more robust way than we are now. Both in our teaching and how we prepare our students, but also in our research. And so the initiative has focussed on a couple of different approaches to really just try to accelerate the work that we do on the broad topic of inequality. We run competitive grant programmes to encourage faculty to pursue research in this area, by providing them with seed funding. We developed a pipeline/early career programme for new PhDs to come to Harvard for two years as post-doc fellows to use that to accelerate their own work on inequality, as well as connect with the network of faculty who are scattered across the university, who are engaged in these topics. There's a research practice component where we have also supported some efforts that are more in the engaged scholarship domain, where it's scholars and students working together with community organisations. So in a few different ways trying to have more of a presence on these issues and in this space.

Dr Rebecca Surender: Is it a centre?

Dean Claudine Gay: It's not at all. Part of that is intentional. I wanted to focus on advancing research with a very light administrative footprint. So really it's a steering committee of dedicated faculty, a relatively modest pool of funds, one that's growing through philanthropy and these discreet programmes that award grants, recruit new PhDs and pair them with faculty mentors at Harvard and a series of events including workshops and seminars. Again trying to create a more vibrant and cohesive intellectual community around the study of inequality.

Dr Rebecca Surender: Before I bring in some of our audience, I will end with one question which is moving in a slightly different direction. But I think is something that certainly the task force will be interested in hearing about.

That is that Oxford and Harvard both occupy a very specific bit of the higher education continuum, in being centres of academic excellence. How do you respond to those challenges which say that actually this whole agenda, widening access, whether it is faculty, whether it's for students, changing the nature of the scholarship and curriculum by widening it, that will potentially undermine the excellence, that there is a trade-off in a way? What is your response? You must have come across that?

Dean Claudine Gay: There's not a week goes by where some version of that argument is not presented to me, shared with me. I fully acknowledge that this is a concern for some. But I really in many ways don't view it as a challenge. The reason is because once you accept that durable change in a faculty governed university setting is not and has never been about issuing proclamations and directives, but always about honestly the slow work of persuasion and sustained effort and engagement over time, then that puts this all into perspective for me.

Getting people to a place where inclusive excellence is not viewed as excellence with an asterisk, after generations of an exclusionary status quo, that's a journey that takes time. These ideas are unfamiliar, so yes, it's enormously frustrating for those of us who are impatient for change. But I don't view it as uniquely challenging. And so in trying to make the case that it is possible to maximise excellence and diversity simultaneously, which I firmly believe it is possible to do. My strategy has generally been to take an empirical approach to things and this reflects my own temperament. I am focussed less on abstract ideas and peer into the souls of my colleagues, and I am much more focussed on collecting and evaluating data and identifying just concrete practical data informed intervention that can move the needle. And hiring, especially faculty hiring is a good example. I'm of the view that talent presents itself in many forms and many settings, including some that may be unfamiliar.

And our traditional search practices often fail to expose us to the breadth of talent that's out there. Faculty positions are defined, our outreach consists of nothing but post an ad to the job site and assuming the right people will find it and apply. Once you broaden your field of vision, even if you do it without the express intention of hiring a candidate that will add diversity to your unit, you quickly see just how much talent is out there to choose from. And why should we deprive ourselves of that. So a big part of our work is focussed on getting hiring committees, whether faculty or staff, but especially for faculty, getting them to develop large pools of applicants to cast the widest possible net, engage in proactive, talent spotting at the front end of the search. We ask them to take a lot of time to do that. And that involves a lot of outreach, posting positions widely, contacting individuals to encourage them to apply. Connecting with affinity resource groups and asking them to send out notices through their networks, and this is just part of the process that we ask committees to invest the most time in, and the results of that work very often are eye-opening including to the sceptics who are convinced that they already know who all the best people are in their field. It turns out you actually don't know. If you do this work instead of having five applicants for this math position, now have 25 or 30. And so my strategy has been to view these claims and more generally the resistance to the idea of inclusive excellence as just empirical questions to test, talent comes in only one form, really, okay, let's open things up and see if that's the case.

And so that is again, much of that just reflects my own temperament, that is the way I approach problems. That combined with recognising that this is why it takes a long time for change to happen in a university setting, because it's just the retail politics and just the sustained engagement over time, that's what makes change happen here.

Dr Rebecca Surender: I feel any one of these issues we could unpick and discuss for a very long time. I am getting told by colleagues behind the scenes we are getting a lot of questions. I'm going to bring in some of the questions from the audience if that's okay. I should say to people participating please tell us your name, if you would like. Equally, send questions anonymously, it is entirely up to you but we want questions. I'm going to lead with a question from a senior colleague at the university, the Director of our Pitt Rivers museum here. She says thank you for coming to speak to us about the work that Harvard has been doing. Certainly inspires us in Oxford in many regards. Given that the Peabody museum is facing challenges similar to some of Oxford University's museums, can you say more on how you have taken on the challenges presented by having over 7,000 ancestral Native American remains there and how does it affect staff and students and can you say a little bit more about how the university is supporting the museum to deal with these legacy issues.

Dean Claudine Gay: That's a great question. So one of the things that is currently under way is a partnership with the university to establish a committee on human remains in museum collections. As you point out the Peabody museum is a steward of many of these remains but not exclusively. And this group is working to articulate a set of principles around ethical stewardship to the difficult issue of human remains, and including the remains, not only from Native American communities, but also the remains of formerly enslaved people that are also at the museum. That work is currently under way. It involves a faculty committee, engagement with community members as well, and as well as the leadership of the Peabody museum namely Jane Pickering. This in some ways is a continuation of a broader conversation that has been taking place in the Peabody, that engages not only the museum's curators but also faculty around ethical stewardship, and decolonisation of the museum. It is an issue that the museum community and faculty community feel very strongly about and one where on some dimensions the Peabody in the past has already not leaned in in ways that, speaking frankly, it should, but that commitment is certainly in place now. So there's work that's under way right now. And the last thing I would say is that part of this is governed by federal law in the US, namely the Native American Graves and Repatriation act, and the Peabody museum for years has engaged in pretty steady repatriation in compliance with that federal law.

Dr Rebecca Surender: Thank you. Another question which goes back to issues of resources. The question says Harvard's root and branch programme sounds amazing. But what is the total budget and how have you gained sufficient funding?

Dean Claudine Gay: Yes, this is excellent. So there are a few ways of thinking about this. Right now I have advanced a lot of those projects by reprioritising. So that's been the number one. There are things that we are not doing now because we're focussing our energy here. In addition to that, I have also engaged in significant philanthropic outreach and there's tremendous support in our alumni and donor community to see Harvard make progress in these areas. And so with respect to the inequality initiative, we have at this point over the last couple of years have raised a few million dollars to support that, enough to be able to support the competitive grants programme as well as to bring in in the coming year four post-doctoral fellows who will spend two years at Harvard. That is what's funding that particular effort.

Again, really just taking dollars from one pot and moving it towards focussing on issues of diversity and inclusion and belonging has generally been my strategy. The final thing I would say is that these recent efforts have a context. The reality is that there has been work done at the level Harvard college in the student life area that's focussed on issues of equity diversion inclusion for years, whether that's through the women's centre or the foundation for intercultural and race relations, there's always been a fair amount of activity in these spaces. There have been pipeline programmes that have brought under-represented students, college students to campus for the summer to engage them in faculty research. These are long, long tenured programmes. What hasn't happened is a way of bringing this all together into an agenda that feels complimentary and synergistic. That's part of the work that's being done by the new Chief Diversity Officer in the FAS.

Dr Rebecca Surender: Can I ask a question clarification, the new position of Chief Diversity Officer, is that an academic lead person or professional?

Dean Claudine Gay: It's professional. Subject matter expert. Her work is done in partnership with the academic leadership. Not only the academic leadership of the FAS but also in the departments and centres and institutes. Because at the end of the day she recognises that work has to be fully embraced and at the end of the day, put into force through the faculty. But she is able to bring the subject matter expertise. It's a professional position.

Dr Rebecca Surender: Do each of the faculties have the equivalent of that role?

Dean Claudine Gay: Interesting. Over the last two years as you look across the Harvard schools, I think just about every one of us at this point has a school level official who is focussed on issues of diversity and inclusion and belonging. I can't think of a school that doesn't. So this year the FAS, the larger of the schools finally appointed someone. The divinity school appointed someone this year.

Last year the business school did. This is something that has been rolling out pretty much across the university.

Dr Rebecca Surender: We have a question from Patricia, one of our Professors in the department of geography and also a member of the task force. She says you use the term inclusive excellence, can you explain what you mean by it?

Dean Claudine Gay: Yeah, that's a great question. So it's the idea that we bring out the best in our teaching and learning and research by leveraging our diversity of experience perspective and viewpoint. In other words, only through embracing inclusivity and enabling individuals to thrive and contribute can our goal of academic excellence be fully realised. That is the concept of inclusive excellence.

Dr Rebecca Surender: In a sentence, thank you. A question from Daisy, one of our EDU leads in our STEM division and she's also a key member of the task force. She's our Project Manager. She says could you talk about your engagement with local communities on racial justice and how you have reached out beyond Harvard.

Dean Claudine Gay: That's a good question as well. That is one where, to be perfectly honest, we have not been so successful. So at the student level there's a fair amount of engagement with the local community. There's been just a robust tradition of social engagement, civic engagement among the student body. All of which enabled and supported and resourced by the Faculty of Arts and Sciences but nonetheless really students being in the lead. Increasingly, over the last couple of years, there has been more faculty engagement with local communities. So engagement with the local police departments on implicit bias training, on education around anti-racism.

There have been some efforts along those lines. But in terms of a broader and more sustained institutional level of engagement with some of the local communities, that really has not happened yet. It's not for lack of interest, but there's also a bit of humility too to it. Because we have a lot of work to do on our own campus before we can.be effective partners at the institutional level along those lines. But with commencement exercises yesterday virtually and the commencement speaker, Ruth Simmons, who is a three-time President, currently the President in Texas but before that was President of Brown and before that Smith and talked about the role that institutions like Harvard can play in more effectively partnering with other institutions of higher education, particularly minority serving institutions, in ways that allow us to deliver on our mission in a way that is much more impactful. While also expanding opportunities for a large number of students who might not benefit directly from a Harvard education, but nonetheless would benefit enormously from greater access to Harvard resources.

Dr Rebecca Surender: We hosted Ruth Simmons at Oxford a few years ago. We have so many questions, I am sorry, I need to keep moving us on. Question from Daphne Cunningham, also a member of our task force. She says is the study of race and racism something the school considers an important part of teaching and research at Harvard? For instance, do you have a centre for study of race and racism?

Dean Claudine Gay: We don't have a centre specifically on that. What we do have however are a number of centres in institutes that engage with the question of inequality, including racial inequality, as well as institutes such as the Hutchins Centre which is a foremost institute focussed on the study of the African diaspora and the African-American experience and it hosts a number of programmes that focus specifically on issues of racial inequality and racism. So no single university centre primarily or centrally concerned with this issue, but it informs the research and agendas of multiple centres and institutes around the university.

Dr Rebecca Surender: One of Oxford's aims is to have more diverse decision-making groups, committees, boards etc. And to have specifically more people of colour represented on those bodies. Do you have any advice on how to go about doing this?

Dean Claudine Gay: So again, I think bringing real intentionality to searches broadly defined, so whether this is an external search to bring a new member into the community, whether a faculty or staff or whether or not it is an internal search for staffing a committee or working group or task force, is to take your time and really search broadly. And be quite proactive in reaching out to people and encouraging them to participate in a decision-making body. Don't make assumptions that they are overburdened or may not be interested or they are asked to do everything and won't want to do this. And so I think that is incredibly important. Then at the end of the day, we actually just need to diversify these institutions so we have more people to choose from when it comes to building internal decision-making bodies.

So there's no substitute for actually just raising representational diversity, university-wide, and that's an important part of the work that we are trying to do here, at the faculty level, at the staff level. In many ways we are trying to catch up to just the dramatic ways that our undergraduate student body has changed over the last 20 years. Or undergraduates at this point are 53-54% people of colour, our undergraduates. A fifth of our undergraduates pay no tuition because they qualify for full financial aid. 25% are first gen. It is an incredibly diverse student body. The leadership of the university has not really kept up with that kind of change.

Dr Rebecca Surender: We have a question from - it's interesting in a way you have just talked about you use the word burdening people, doing some of this work and a member of the task force writes, thank you very much for this discussion. How do you manage the time, energy, burden on staff, who are committed to doing this work alongside their day job, their research, teaching commitments etc?

Dean Claudine Gay: That is a great question. First of all I think people should be compensated for the work they do in this area. That is what we try to do. We don't view it as additive and uncompensated, we try to compensate people for the work they do in this area. So really trying to identify for example for some of the committees, I will take for example the group of three tenure faculty that have agreed to serve as we have been calling senior advisers on faculty development who go around and educate their colleagues about best practices related to DIB, these are folks that are not subject matter experts but they care really deeply about the communal life of the university. Very deeply about diversity. And they probably would do this work for free, but I would never ask them to do this for free. Each of them for their work is paid a small stipend, which they can take as compensation or put directly into the research budget. In exchange for doing this work on the behalf of the FAS for the year. So that is a way in which it's like we're - this is not we don't want it to be uncompensated. If we value this, we should value it. So that's part of it.

The other piece of this is the reason why it's not one faculty adviser is that we actually want to spread the burden, but also create a sense of community and cohort among the groups that can be mutually supportive. This is really hard work. Some of the conversations that they facilitate among their colleagues are really, really, difficult conversations. I don't want them to feel emotionally, psychologically, overtaxed by doing this work. So trying to build communities of interest around this kind of work is another way of compensating in some way people for the work they are doing on this front. I do agree, this is work that has value. Other things that have value we compensate people for. We should be compensating people for this as well.

The final thing I would say is that one of the things I always encourage faculty and especially our tenure track early career faculty to do is not let this be work that happens in the shadows. You should be telling people, telling your senior colleagues, telling your Deans, telling your tenure committee about the work and the labour you are performing on behalf of the university. So that's another piece of it. I think it's important for that work to be recognised and rewarded.

Dr Rebecca Surender: I have a number of questions queueing up but I also have colleagues reminding me that we are right on the end of time. So I have the very unpopular task right now of saying I've got to draw this session to a close. Many thanks to the audience who joined us. Sorry if we didn't get to your question today. In particular, many, many thanks to Dean Claudine Gay on behalf of our task force and the audience at Oxford for joining us today. You have just I think given us a wonderful, if only just too brief, beginning of discussion on these important issues. Thank you for being so detailed, for being so candid. Just from the questions and the flow of discussion, we could have gone or for several hours. We really appreciate your generous collegiality on this.

Dean Claudine Gay: I really enjoyed the opportunity to engage and get to know you better. I am thrilled we have an international partner who is in the same place we are, lots of commitment, but still a lot of work to do. We are both works in progress.

Dr Rebecca Surender: Stay in touch and we'll continue the conversation. Goodbye.

ENDS