The following proposal highlights issues of gender inequality in the classroom at Harvard College. It suggests ways the task force might address these issues through institutional research and enhanced pedagogy that could play a part in broader cultural change toward a more inclusive campus.

**ACTION:** If you think the issues highlighted in the proposal and attached research should be a priority of the Presidential Task Force on Inclusion and Belonging, please sign in and “like” it, leave comments with statements of support and suggestions, and share a link to this page with your networks.

**Proposal for Promoting Gender Equity in the Classroom at Harvard College**

24 April 2017, Harvard College Women’s Cabinet

**Background**

Harvard College is committed to “creating and sustaining the conditions that enable all Harvard College students to experience an unparalleled educational journey that is intellectually, socially, and personally transformative” (https://college.harvard.edu/about/mission-and-vision, emphasis added). Similarly, the College Office for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion seeks to “permanently embed diversity and inclusion in the fabric of Harvard College’s academic, residential, and work environments” (http://diversity.college.harvard.edu/about). The classroom is a central arena in which the University is mandated to pursue these goals, and yet, current protocol for training teaching fellows (TF) or faculty is opaque and likely inconsistent, raising concerns about the extent to which trainings address gender equity concerns. In this proposal, we focus specifically on Teaching Fellows (TFs) because they can play an integral role in promoting gender equity due to their access and ability to directly address inequity in section discussions and promote inclusive classroom culture. As members of the Harvard community who have observed and experienced gender inequity in the classroom experience at Harvard College, we hope that the administration will take its mandate for equity seriously by pursuing comprehensive research on student academic experience that particularly considers gender as a salient identity impacting engagement, access, and inclusion at Harvard College.

At a Women’s Week event, students gathered to reflect on the history of women at Harvard and their own experiences of being women at Harvard. Participants discussed how it felt to be a woman at Harvard, times they were aware of their gender at Harvard, and what would

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1 #HarvardforHer, held on March 4, 2017, by the Women’s Cabinet, affiliated with the Harvard College Women’s Center, and the Diversity Peer Educators affiliated with the Harvard College Office for Diversity Equity and Inclusion,
contribute to a sense of belonging at Harvard. A major theme that arose from this conversation was a recognition that while many students felt they should be experiencing gender equity in the classroom experience, the reality often fell short of this expectation. Below are a collection of student comments from the event:

- “I was p-setting for my math class and felt overwhelmed by the male dominance in the room.”
- “I feel aware of my gender when I am in classes that embody patriarchal norms.”
- “Policies that level the playing field in my interests would give me a sense of belonging at Harvard.”
- “Being a woman at Harvard feels powerful, yet still inhibited.”
- “In classroom discussions, sometimes men feel it is ok and acceptable to interrupt me or act like my opinion isn’t valid, even though I don’t do that to them.”
- “Being a woman at Harvard to me means being asked to learn and become in a deeply masculine and classed paradigm and to perform masculinity on a daily basis.”
- “It often feels like my male professors and teaching fellows either connect more or are more personable with male students in my STEM classes.”
- “Masculine qualities open opportunities and these opportunities should be for everyone”
- "I want to do what I want (pursue concentration in humanities) and still have it be valued equally"
- “I was very aware of my gender as a woman student when I was placed in my all women section for [a humanities department class]”

From this student feedback, review of literature pertaining to gender equity in the classroom (much of which has been largely available for nearly thirty years), recognition that the current process for TF training is not transparent and potentially outdated, and acknowledgment of the fact that Harvard has only enrolled women for the past forty years, we ascertain that there is still a substantial embedded institutional legacy of privileging men/maleness within the classroom at Harvard College. Members of the Women’s Cabinet, with the support of Harvard College Women’s Center, propose that a comprehensive study investigating the status of gender equity in the classroom be conducted over the coming academic year (2017-2018) with prep work taking place over the preceding summer. We hope that the results of this study can be incorporated into a TF and faculty training curriculum that specifically incorporates the goal of promoting gender equity and broader inclusion in the academic experience of all Harvard students regardless of their intersecting identities. This project is in response to current students’ concerns about inequity derived from the gendered academic experience at Harvard, and is in line with mission of the College and EDI office and the objectives of at least three other separate entities at Harvard:
The Office of the Assistant to the President for Institutional Diversity and Equity aims to “lead a sustained University-wide effort and to develop, coordinate, and advance inclusive excellence, diversity, and equal opportunity (EO) initiatives, programs and policies at Harvard University,” and creates initiatives to meet this objective. The office is also invested in promoting knowledge of the centrality, benefits, and meaning of “equal opportunity and equity outreach efforts” at the University through trainings, outreach, reports, and other initiatives. We believe this project is in line with these goals and would further their achievement.

The Harvard Business School Gender Initiative supports “a research agenda, course development, case-writing, and a learning community of business partners committed to advancing women leaders and promoting gender equity,” and dismantling “discrimination, stereotypes, implicit biases, and power disparities that limit women’s and men’s ability to thrive, contribute maximally, and lead whole, fulfilled, and sustainable lives.” HBS has also set precedents for analyzing the status of women’s achievements and challenges in the academic environment at HBS through its 2010 initiative to increase the number of female faculty and promote academic participation and achievement of female students. We see the positive impact that the Business School’s steps to assess and promote gender equity on an institutional level have had, and we hope the Faculty of Arts and Science at the College will follow its example with this project.

The Diversity and Inclusion Working Group Final Report (2015) notes that “Female upperclassmen in particular concentrations may dissuade incoming freshmen from pursuing concentrations perceived as hostile due to “no recognition within the department that this [gender bias] is an issue.” [This]... lead[s] to a disproportionate number of students opting out of certain concentrations.” and that “a gender gap deters potential female math concentrators”. They also recognize that women at Harvard find themselves in “a larger context where their humanity is measured against a masculinist standard”. And yet, no portion of the Report was specifically dedicated to assessing gender/women’s experience in the classroom. We believe that the goals of this project are in line with those of the 2015 Working Group and would enrich its findings in an area the Report does not sufficiently explore.

This proposal comes at a time in which the urgency of pursuing gender equity in all areas of University functioning cannot be overstated. As the Task Force on the Prevention of Sexual Assault noted in its Final Report, “sexual assault results from deeply entrenched behaviors, societal structures, and problematic beliefs that will be addressed effectively only through sustained effort by this community, other institutions of higher education, and society at large.” The study proposed here aims to add to the sustained efforts by this community already working to address these deeply entrenched behaviors that perpetuate gender inequality on this campus.
Objectives
The Women’s Cabinet submits this proposal for more institutional support of gender-inclusive practices in the classroom with the following objectives in mind:

- Conduct a qualitative and quantitative study of the student experience in classrooms that specifically looks at gender and concentrations
- Provide more institutional support for students and faculty in departments already working to address the gender gap in students’ classroom experience, to strengthen evaluation and response to the issues through connecting and coordinating efforts University-wide
- Research theory on pedagogy and best practices for creating inclusive classroom experiences, especially for women in male-dominated classes and concentrations (such as blind grading or cold calling)
- Produce recommendations that can be incorporated into teaching fellow and faculty trainings for how to facilitate discussions around inclusion and create a classroom environment with equal opportunities for all students, regardless of gender (and other) identities.
- Create incentives for teaching fellow and faculty to utilize these recommendations on inclusive pedagogy when structuring their classes and establishing class norms at the beginning and throughout the semester.

Scope
This project aims to investigate and outline ways to address gender inequity as it manifests in classroom structure and experience, teaching fellow and faculty pedagogy, academic concentrations (gender imbalances), departmental practices, and access to academic opportunities. While there are innumerable ways in which gender structures impact student life, this project focuses specifically on academic experience.

The scope of this project exceeds the capacity any individual unit, however, with facilitated collaboration between the following groups we believe the objectives can be accomplished in the timeframe outlined below.

Timeframe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Start and End Dates</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase One</td>
<td>Prep work for study (locate sponsoring offices, funding, interested professors; extensive literature review; form committee to conduct study)</td>
<td>1 June 2017 - 1 August 2017</td>
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Phase Two
Committee designs study
August 2017 - October 2017

Phase Three
Implement study (with mid-year evaluation)
1 September 2017 - 10 May 2018

Phase Four
Assessment
Throughout/May - June 2018

Key Stakeholders

Benefiting constituency
Harvard College students, staff, and faculty

Partners
Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning, Gender Inclusivity in Math (GIIM), Harvard Business School, Harvard College Institutional Research Office, Harvard College Women’s Center, Harvard Graduate School of Education, Harvard Initiative on Learning and Teaching, Studies of Women, Gender, and Sexuality, Mathematics Department, Office of the Assistant to the President for Institutional Diversity and Equity, School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, Office for Undergraduate Education, Psychology Department, Women’s Cabinet, Women in Computer Science (WICS)

Project manager
To be assigned by Presidential Task Force on Inclusion and Belonging

Monitoring and Evaluation

- A subcommittee of the Presidential Task Force on Inclusion and Belonging should be formed that includes key partners outlined above.
- Monthly Committee Meetings will ensure timely progress of research into current status
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- The Committee will produce a final report outlining the current inequalities, with recommendations for enhanced and up-to-date pedagogy to be included in required faculty and TF trainings.

In her letter on single-gender social organizations, President Drew Faust said the following:

“Throughout its history, Harvard has worked to broaden its educational reach, to enhance the effectiveness of its teaching, and to ensure that its students are prepared for the diverse world into which they will graduate. We undertake this work purposefully, as part of our commitment to self-examination, reassessment, adaptation, and innovation. Tradition is important, especially to an institution with our long reach into the past, but we must measure it against the contemporary needs of a dynamic, modern academic community.

We couldn’t agree more, and we call on Harvard to invest in making gender inclusion in the classroom a priority. Simply abolishing single-gender organizations will not solve the larger cultural issues that also surface in classrooms and residence halls. We cannot simply look at self-segregation and gendered practices in campus social organizations without looking at these patterns in students’ academic lives as well. There is a web of relationality connecting the cultural, social, and economic factors that are creating unequal experiences for women and underrepresented students in classrooms, and until leaders within the institution support efforts to address these concerns holistically, the College will not be able to equitably realize the mission of educating the citizens and citizen-leaders for our society.

This document is a collaborative effort between the Women’s Center and the Women’s Cabinet, and we would like to acknowledge the support of the Women’s Center intern team and members of the Women’s Cabinet.

Sincerely,

Kara Chyung
Incoming Women’s Cabinet Chair

Emily Zoffer and Mido Choi
Outgoing Women’s Cabinet Co-Chairs