

Appendix F. Report of the Afternoon of Engagement

On April 5, 2017, students, staff, and faculty and academic personnel filled Sanders Theatre and the Joseph B. Martin Conference Center in Longwood. The afternoon included an innovative program of storytelling and small group participatory reflection. Using digital tools, scribes, and a “theme team,” we were able to capture notes from all those conversations. Thanks to the terrific energy and engagement in the room, we gathered 1,536 distinct comments. Here is a summary of what we learned:

1. Staff turnout was much higher than turnout by students or academic personnel. The timing of the event during classes was surely an issue, as were the challenges of communicating to these constituencies and fatigue, particularly among students, with the thematic area arising from the numerous School-based task forces that have been underway for the past few years.
2. Harvard is a very hierarchical organization, with tenured faculty at the top. The basic hierarchical structure is unlikely to change, but this makes it all the more important to increase empathy and respect. Many people commented that people who should know their names did not, that people who know them pass them on campus without acknowledging them, and that they are infrequently invited to comment (for instance during committee meetings) on their domains and areas of expertise. Many specific suggestions were made for how we might develop a culture of empathy and build bridges across the lines dividing students, staff, and academic personnel. These can be found in the [Solution Space](#).
3. Harvard operates with a reliance on relationships, tacit knowledge, and social networks. This is evident in the prolific use of acronyms and the minimal use of signage. Newcomers especially find navigating Harvard a challenge unless someone takes them under his, her, or their wing. The difficulty of acquiring all the relevant tacit knowledge means that people feel like newcomers for longer than they think they should. The fact that improvements of this situation rely on what feels like the contingent acquisition of a mentor, guide, or adviser was troubling to people. The basic message is that life, study, and work at Harvard need to be easier to navigate. We need more in the way of guidebooks, or the equivalent. Also, we need to make sure that mentorship, guidance, and advising are provided equitably. Again, many specific suggestions were made, which can be found in the [Solution Space](#).

4. We heard concerns about marginalization and exclusion connected to specific identities and experiences: religious minorities; second-language speakers; people with disabilities; LGBTQ individuals; low-income students; students of color; ideological minorities; and staff, students, and academic personnel who spend most of their time at the Longwood campus.
5. Participants offered many suggestions about ways to increase inclusion and belonging at Harvard for staff especially. These included increasing “One Harvard” events, activities, and opportunities to mix across Schools and units. Many suggestions focused on increasing staff inclusion such as providing more opportunities for professional development; increasing voice and influence for staff; making diversity, inclusion, and belonging a more general priority among managers; and improving onboarding.
6. Participants committed themselves to taking action immediately to increase inclusion and belonging in their offices, classrooms, and Schools. Some committed to meeting and greeting colleagues whom they work with but do not know. Others committed to spending more energy mentoring others. Several committed to meet others from their Afternoon of Engagement small group to continue conversations across Schools and, especially, student-staff divides. Some committed to increasing recognition and respect, for example by “learning the names of security guards and dining hall staff” and “taking time to get to know people instead of racing by them.” Some committed to trying to overcome the “imposter syndrome” by, for example “being brave enough to share my own opinions” and calling out the imposter phenomenon with graduate students and colleagues.
7. Finally, after the event, we heard from many both how rewarding and how difficult the conversations had been. The conversations were in randomly mixed small groups and brought together people from very different positions. In the moment, participants rose to the occasion. This was experienced as liberating by very many but also as personally difficult and emotionally taxing by others. We have, however, consistently received feedback from people that they wished Harvard had more events of this kind and more events that made the aspiration to be “One Harvard” a reality.