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COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
2176 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6100

December 20, 2023

Ms. Penny Pritzker
Senior Fellow
Harvard Corporation
Massachusetts Hall Cambridge, MA 02138

Dear Ms. Pritzker:

The House Committee on Education and the Workforce (Committee) has begun a review of Harvard University's (Harvard) handling of credible allegations of plagiarism by President Claudine Gay over a period of 24 years.¹ An allegation of plagiarism by a top school official at *any* university would be reason for concern, but Harvard is not just any university. It styles itself as one of the top educational institutions in the country.

The Harvard College Honor Code, which is "in effect for the academic community of Harvard College beginning in Fall 2015," provides:

Members of the Harvard College community commit themselves to producing academic work of integrity – that is, work that adheres to the scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of sources, appropriate collection and use of data, and transparent acknowledgement of the contribution of others to their ideas, discoveries, interpretations, and conclusions. Cheating on exams or problem sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the ideas or language of someone else as one's own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates the standards of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs.²

Does Harvard hold its faculty and academic leadership to the same standards?

¹ Rahem D. Hamid, Nia L. Orakwue, and Elias J. Schisgall, *Despite Support From Corporation, Harvard President Gay Under Fire Over Plagiarism Allegations*, Harvard Crimson (Dec. 12, 2023), <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2023/12/12/allegations-plagiarism-gay-dissertation>.

² The Honor Code, Harvard University, <https://honor.fas.harvard.edu/honor-code>.

The Committee understands that Harvard was first approached by the New York Post on October 24th, 2023.³ Harvard's response, a 15-page letter sent by defamation attorney Thomas Clare on the 27th of October, contains comments from some of the academics whose works the Post alleged to have been plagiarized by President Gay.⁴ In the letter, the academics rebuke accusations of plagiarism. But other members of academia disagree. Peter Wood, the director of the National Association of Scholars, said to the Washington Free Beacon that "if this were a stand-alone instance, it would be reprehensible but perhaps excused as the blunder of someone working hastily. But that excuse vanishes as the examples multiply."⁵ Anne Williamson, a professor of political science at Miami University, put it more bluntly: "My first reaction is shock. The second reaction is puzzlement... All she had to do is give me a credit."⁶ These events are not isolated. Yesterday, a 37-page report was sent to Harvard's research integrity officer addressing additional allegations of plagiarism.⁷ It is Harvard's responsibility to investigate each claim with the seriousness with which it investigates allegations against students.

As you know, federal funding to Harvard is conditioned upon the school's adherence to the standards of a recognized accreditor. Harvard's accrediting body, the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE), maintains Standards for Accreditation (Standards)⁸ that emphasize the paramount importance of academic and institutional integrity. Compliance with these standards is a requirement to maintain accreditation. Specifically, an accredited institution must demonstrate that it "works to prevent cheating and plagiarism as well as to deal forthrightly with any instances in which they occur."⁹ The university must make "adequate provision ... to ensure academic honesty" and its "policies and procedures" must include "fairness in dealing with students, faculty, and staff."¹⁰ The Committee expects an NECHE-accredited institution to "subscribe to and advocate [for] high ethical standards."¹¹ Harvard does hold its students to these high academic and ethical standards: in the 2021-22 school year, the Harvard College Honor Council investigated 42 incidents of plagiarism, 35 allegations of exam cheating, and 19 other Honor Code violations.¹² 70 of these 100 cases resulted in a finding of responsibility, and 46

³ Isabel Vincent, *Harvard covered up secret plagiarism probe into president Claudine Gay during antisemitism storm — threatened The Post*, New York Post (Dec. 12, 2023, 6:03 PM), <https://nypost.com/2023/12/12/news/harvard-secret-plagiarism-probe-into-president-claudine-gay>.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Aaron Sibarium, *'This is Definitely Plagiarism': Harvard University President Claudine Gay Copied Entire Paragraphs From Others' Academic Work and Claimed Them as Her Own*, Washington Free Beacon (Dec. 11, 2023), <https://freebeacon.com/campus/this-is-definitely-plagiarism-harvard-university-president-claudine-gay-copied-entire-paragraphs-from-others-academic-work-and-claimed-them-as-her-own>.

⁶ Vincent, *supra* note 3.

⁷ Aaron Sibarium, *Fresh Allegations of Plagiarism Unearthed in Official Academic Complaint Against Claudine Gay*, Washington Free Beacon (Dec. 19, 2023), <https://freebeacon.com/campus/fresh-allegations-of-plagiarism-unearthed-in-official-academic-complaint-against-claudine-gay>.

⁸ Standards for Accreditation, New England Commission of Higher Education, <https://www.neche.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Standards-for-Accreditation-2021.pdf>.

⁹ *Id.* at 18.

¹⁰ *Id.* at 31.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² Harvard College Honor Council Annual Report 2021-22, Harvard Office of Academic Integrity and Student Conduct, https://honorcouncil.fas.harvard.edu/files/honorcouncil/files/ar_hcnc_21-22_01302023.pdf.

resulted in academic probation or mandatory withdrawal.¹³ Again, does Harvard hold its faculty – and its own president – to the same standards?

Our concern is that standards are not being applied consistently, resulting in different rules for different members of the academic community. If a university is willing to look the other way and not hold faculty accountable for engaging in academically dishonest behavior, it cheapens its mission and the value of its education. Students must be evaluated fairly, under known standards – and have a right to see that faculty are, too. To help provide assurance that Harvard is adequately, appropriately, and, most importantly, equally applying these general standards of academic honesty, please produce the following documents:

1. All documents and communications concerning the initial allegations of plagiarism and the “independent review” of President Claudine Gay’s scholarship described in the December 12, 2023, email¹⁴ to Harvard alumni and students. This request includes all meeting minutes, transcripts, notes, coordinating communications, memoranda, or other materials relating to any discussion of this issue by the Harvard Corporation and Board of Overseers.
2. All documents and communications concerning allegations of plagiarism by President Gay and the University’s public response to media inquiries about those allegations.
3. A list of any disciplinary actions taken against Harvard faculty or students on the basis of academic integrity violations, research misconduct, inadequate citation, or other forms of plagiarism, from January 1, 2019, to present. This list should include an anonymized description of the subject of discipline, the date of the alleged misconduct, dates of any adjudicatory or disciplinary meetings, whether any outside counsel or supportive individual was permitted (and whether such an individual was present), and any disciplinary action imposed.
4. Any non-public guidelines or policies governing the university’s process for reviewing and adjudicating allegations of plagiarism.
5. Any and all communications between Harvard and its regional accreditor, the New England Commission of Higher Education, regarding its performance on Standard 9.1 regarding academic honesty, including any relating to Harvard’s investigation into the allegations against President Gay and potential disparities in Harvard’s treatment of faculty and staff.

The Committee is empowered under Rule X, clause 1 of the Rules of the House of Representatives to conduct oversight over all postsecondary education programs, including Higher Education Act programs.

¹³ *Id.* at 4.

¹⁴ Statement from the Harvard Corporation: Our President, Harvard University, <https://www.harvard.edu/blog/2023/12/12/statement-from-the-harvard-corporation-our-president/>

Please see the attached instructions for relevant definitions and other directions for the production of documents. This request encompasses responsive materials in the possession of not only Harvard faculty and staff, but also individual members of the Harvard Corporation and Board of Overseers. The request also extends to any informal communications such as text messages. We expect that this request will be conveyed promptly to all parties who would be reasonably expected to have responsive materials.

Please direct any questions about this inquiry to David Samberg at david.samberg@mail.house.gov or 202.225.4527. Please provide a written response by December 29, 2023.

Sincerely,



Virginia Foxx
Chairwoman
U. S. House Committee on
Education and the Workforce