

Sociology 1130: Student Leadership and Service in Higher Education  
Final Paper

# Student Agency and the Possibility of Institutional Change through Harvard's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Offices

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## *Abstract*

52 student interns, many belonging to marginalized groups, are employed through internship programs at four offices under the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion branch of the Harvard College Dean of Students Office. This project explores student perception of the roles, their compensation, and their ability to effect change at both an office-wide and institutional level. Generally, student interns believe that they are fairly compensated for their labor. However, they do not feel appreciated by Harvard or believe that their roles matter, and a general consensus amongst student interns reveals that they perceive little ability to effect institutional change above the level of their office. This paper then offers a number of policy recommendations in order to both improve the EDI intern role and further EDI-related goals at Harvard.

*I affirm my awareness of the standards of the Harvard College Honor Code.*

Signed,

Ellie Taylor

## **Introduction**

Over 50 interns, many belonging to marginalized groups and experienced in advocacy, organizing, and leadership, gathered at the start of the 2020 Spring Semester for their biannual training in four Harvard offices related to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. The training was spent not learning from members of other offices, coordinating programs, or discussing sources of improvement. The entirety of the training was emblematic of the first activity - interns were told to impersonate eggs, dinosaurs, and chickens for a 30-minute icebreaker activity. It is not uncommon for structured interactions between interns across Harvard's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Offices, when they infrequently occur, to be relatively unproductive. Conversations at EDI intern-wide gatherings rarely center around strategizing priorities and getting things done, instead, interns learn about "self-care" and "identity," and hear time and time again that making change is a slow process. Interns are affirmed about "all of the hard and meaningful work that they do," despite their work being heavily restricted by bureaucratic mechanisms and rendering it far less meaningful than it could be. The students who hold these roles bring a wide range of experience and talent to their positions and their potential can appear frustratingly untapped.

As a student intern in the Office of BGLTQ Student Life, what I believe is the most influential part of my work is helping various Harvard student groups address questions, problems, or concerns related to LGBTQ+ rights. Over the past two years, I've had the opportunity to work with religious groups, peer counseling groups, musical groups, and various Harvard Offices to lead trainings, workshops, and community discussions on a wide variety of topics within the realm of LGBTQ+ rights. I also feel obligated to use my role to push for

reforms in university policy to improve the campus climate surrounding issues that affect marginalized communities. Outside of my work with student groups, I have doubts about what possibilities for change there are in my role, causing me to question how my voice has been simultaneously uplifted and stifled as a result of working within Harvard's bureaucracy. As a result of my role, I have also questioned how my compensated and institutionalized role has coerced me into modifying my behavior. As a representative of a Harvard Office, there are things I can and shouldn't comment on, there are standards that I have to hold my work to, and I am expected to report to my administrative higher-ups instead of completing work independently. Still, I enjoy the work that I do and I believe that my direct connections to the administration give me more leverage in advocating for policies that I believe in. Moreover, I am paid for my labor at an institution where many student leaders are under-compensated or entirely uncompensated for the work that they do.

Perhaps more cynically, I also wonder if and how the existence of the EDI intern roles masks, or even demonstrates, institutional reluctance towards more comprehensive measures to promote inclusivity and diversity. For example, does the existence of the Office of Diversity Education and Support, which provides support for undocumented and mixed immigration status students, conceal the fact the Harvard is not officially a sanctuary campus?

In comparison to other large-scale student advocacy efforts to make change on our campus, such as the push for fossil fuel and prison industrial complex divestment, I question whether or not these institutionalized roles have the capacity to create reform. I also wonder how interns perceive their compensation, especially given that this work involves labor that often goes unpaid. Relatedly, my questions center around student agency, the administrative

perception of the student intern role, and opportunities for improving the EDI intern role, or even furthering EDI-related goals at Harvard.

### **Guiding Questions for Research**

*Question 1:* How do student interns perceive the agency they have within their EDI role?

- What changes have interns been able to enact through their role?
- What aspects of life at Harvard do student interns perceive that their roles give them the opportunity to influence?
- Do students view themselves as partners with administrators?
- What enhances or limits student interns' perception of their agency?

*Question 2:* How do administrators perceive the roles of student interns in the EDI Offices?

- Why were these intern roles created?
- Do administrators view themselves as partners with students?
- Does administrative perception of the EDI intern roles differ from student perception?

*Question 3:* What opportunities for improvement do student interns perceive?

- What about the intern role do students believe could be improved?
- How do students believe their agency can be increased?
- What about the EDI Offices do students want to change?

### **Literature Review**

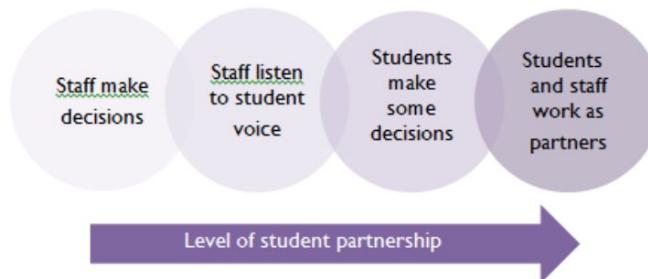
Agency in the realm of social science has its conceptual beginnings with a definition from Giddens (1984), which refers to agency not as “the intentions people have in doing things but to their capability of doing those things in the first place” (Giddens, 1984, 9). Over the years, the idea of agency has been applied to a variety of subjects, including Higher Education. Boyte (2008) considers civic agency for students to be “the ability to negotiate and transform a world

that is understood to be fluid and open,” although they note that student civic agency is at risk of being “overshadowed” by bureaucratic mechanisms and expectations and rules of conduct that can be described by phenomenon called technocratic creep (Boyte, 2008). Klemenčič (2015) posits a theory of student agency, suggesting that it is “temporally embedded,” “relational and social,” “situated in structural, cultural, and socio-economic-political contexts,” and “encompasses various notions of “agentic possibility” (power) and “agentic orientation” (will)” (Klemenčič, 2015).

Currently, a variety of frameworks exist to evaluate agency and the capacity to make change. Schlossberg (1989) suggests a metric for evaluating student “mattering,” which involves (1) attention, (2) importance, (3) ego-extension, (4) dependence, and (5) appreciation. These five facets of mattering were used to develop a 5-point Likert scale with which the degree to which individuals believe they matter could be evaluated. Jääskelä et al. (2017) developed the Agency of University Students (AUS) Scale, which was the first attempt to quantitatively evaluate student agency. Like Schlossberg, Jääskelä developed a 5-point Likert scale that addressed students’ perception of interest and motivation, self-efficacy, competence beliefs, participatory activity, equal treatment, teacher support, peer support, trust, opportunities to influence, and opportunities to make choices (Jääskelä et al., 2017, 2069). Although the AUS does not directly measure students vis-a-vis administrators (the AUS was developed by studying student agency in relation to professors), it is the most current model and complete to evaluate the agency of students acting within an administrative body.

Healy et al. (2014) suggest four degrees of student involvement in the decision-making process, ranging from least to most decision-making power, where students and staff work as

partners. These varying levels of student partnership can be fitted within working definitions of student agency, thus Healy et. al (2014) provide another model with which to gauge student agency, specifically within the context of an administrative bureaucracy. The model from *Fig. 1* and the AUS provide metrics to evaluate the intern roles in Harvard's EDI Offices with respect to student agency.



*Fig. 1: Varying levels of student partnership (Healy et al., 2014, 10).*

Another crucial factor in examining Harvard's EDI Offices is the nature of the work performed by these administrative bodies in particular, as these offices have been tasked with ensuring that students with historically marginalized identities have resources and feel like they belong at Harvard. Brint (2019) identifies the creation of “specialized offices to provide services to particular student groups, including minority students, [and] LBGTQ students” as a necessary feature of “administrative bloat” in order to further inclusivity goals (Brint, 2019, 252). However, these offices are not necessarily immune to “technocratic creep,” which can affect those calling for social justice in “struggles against racism, sexism, and homophobia,” as discussed by Boyte (2008). According to a 2016 report, at colleges and universities where students discern a more comprehensive institutional commitment to diversity, students report less bias and discrimination (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, 41). Aguirre and Martinez (2002)

suggest that a framework of leadership practices for diversity (which involves hiring and empowering faculty with marginalized identities and implementing a multicultural curriculum) results in longer-lasting institutional change, as opposed to a framework of diversity practices for leadership (which involves creating opportunities within the administration to promote diversity) (Aguirre & Martinez, 2002, 59). This body of research provides a more clear picture of the role of diversity in higher education administration, its importance, and the effective methods of institutionalizing goals of diversity.

The current body of literature leaves some gaps in our potential understanding of these intern roles. Does greater student agency reflect a greater institutional commitment to a cause, or simply greater trust of students? Moreover, even the most updated metric of evaluating student agency from Jääskelä et al. (2017) is not explicitly for understanding students and administrators.

## **Methods**

In order to assess perceptions of student agency within student EDI intern roles, I have opted for a survey that incorporates various elements of the literature on student agency, as well as questions that seem undeniably relevant to the inquiry at hand. The concept of “opportunities to influence” from the AUS scale developed by Jääskelä et al. (2017) I believed was an especially helpful way of isolating areas where students believe they have agency and where they do not. This resulted in questions about specific changes that interns believe they have created as well as which aspects of life at Harvard they believe can be influenced through their roles. From the scale developed by Healy et al. (2014) arise questions about perceptions of student/administrator partnership, and questions about student mattering are informed by the metrics from Schlossberg (1989).

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the survey will ask how student interns believe their role could be modified to increase their agency. This survey will be distributed to all of the interns in Harvard's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity Offices, which includes the Harvard Foundation, the Harvard College Women's Center, the Office of BGLTQ Student Life, and the Office of Diversity Education and Support. Respondents will be given the opportunity to discuss individual experiences at greater length through an in-person interview. The choice of a qualitative survey will help to compare possible discrepancies between perceptions of intern roles within different EDI Offices (i.e. Student interns at the Harvard Foundation might perceive greater agency than student interns at the Women's Center), and the opportunity for interviews will help to provide a more complete picture of the intangible aspects of work in these roles.

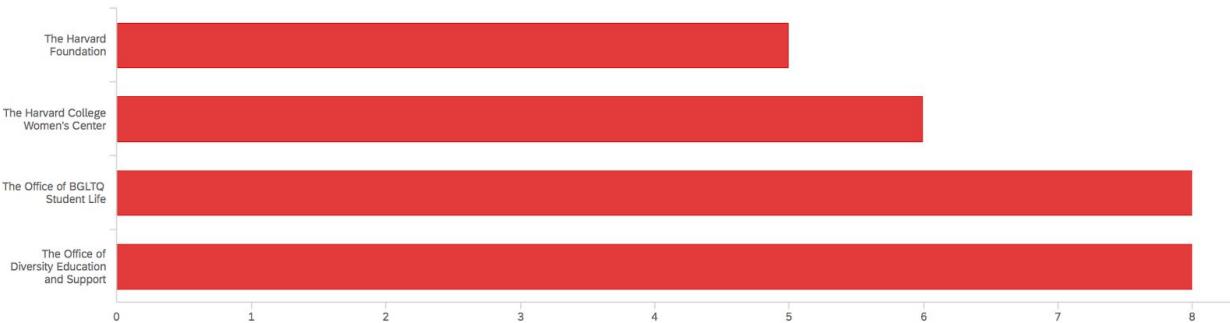
On the administrative side, a corresponding survey will be distributed to the directors and assistant directors of each EDI Office, in addition to the higher-up administrators who oversee the EDI branch of the Dean of Students Office. This includes the Dean of Students and the acting Dean of the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity Offices. The survey for administrators will include questions about evaluating student agency based on the AUS scale, as well as questions about the extent to which students are viewed as partners. It will also ask about details of why the student intern roles within each EDI office were conceptualized and how administrators intended the roles to serve members of the Harvard community.

This survey was written on Qualtrics and sent to the four intern teams in the EDI Offices -- the Harvard Foundation, the Harvard College Women's Center, the Office of BGLTQ Student Life, and the Office of Diversity Education and Support -- which consist of 52 student interns in total. A survey for administrators was written with questions explicitly paralleling those sent to

student interns, and was distributed to the administrative staff in each EDI office, which all have a role in overseeing the student interns, as well as the Dean of the EDI branch of Harvard's administration.

## **Results**

The survey for student interns had over a 50% response rate, with 27 responses from a cohort of approximately 52 student interns. This can likely be attributed to the social and personal connections between interns, including connections used to solicit survey responses. There were enough responses to compare data in aggregate, but based on lower response rates from student interns in certain offices, comparing data between EDI offices proved unreliable.



*Fig. 2: Distribution of Intern Survey Responses based on EDI Office*

The survey for administrators received two responses in total, which gave some qualitative results but was inadequate for comparing quantitatively. It is not entirely clear why the survey response rate was so low for administrators.

No student intern followed up about being involved in an interview, potentially because of the disruption to coursework precipitated by the COVID-19 epidemic. However, information from the typed responses to the surveys can provide some more qualitative insight into the nature of EDI intern work.

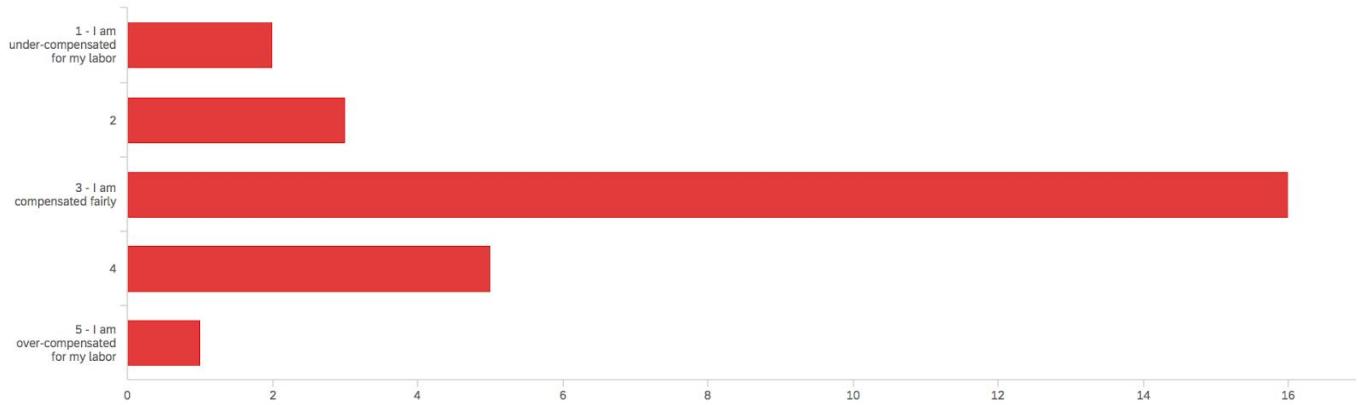
### Student Motivations for Working in EDI

Students cited numerous reasons for taking the intern role, the most common ones being the necessity of a paid job and hopes of finding and building community based around their identity. For many, the role presented an opportunity to make a positive impact on campus. Other interns found the potential for professional development and the possibility to influence Harvard appealing. One intern wrote that they “perhaps naively believed in change at the institutional level” as one of the contributing factors to their decision to intern in the EDI Offices. Many students expressed interest in working in the EDI for a number of years, with one third of respondents planning on working in EDI until the end of their college career.

### Compensation of Student Workers

A sizable majority – approximately 59% – of student interns said that they felt Harvard compensated them fairly for their labor, although three interns did identify their priority for improving the EDI intern program as to increasing student intern compensation. One student wrote that “the University benefits much more from both the paid and unpaid labor of these interns than they are given credit for,” and one intern reflected on their compensation, saying, “we are doing the work of experts, therapists, professors, and sociologists that Harvard refuses to do on like \$15 an hour.” Another intern expressed that they would rather have greater power to influence outcomes at a College-wide level instead of compensation, a sentiment echoed by an intern who wrote, “Monetarily, I am well compensated. As far as the administration honoring the work we do, not so much outside of the EDI Offices.” An intern who has worked in EDI for a number of years explained that their pay has been raised over time from \$11/hour to \$15/hour and the current pay feels “a lot more fair.”

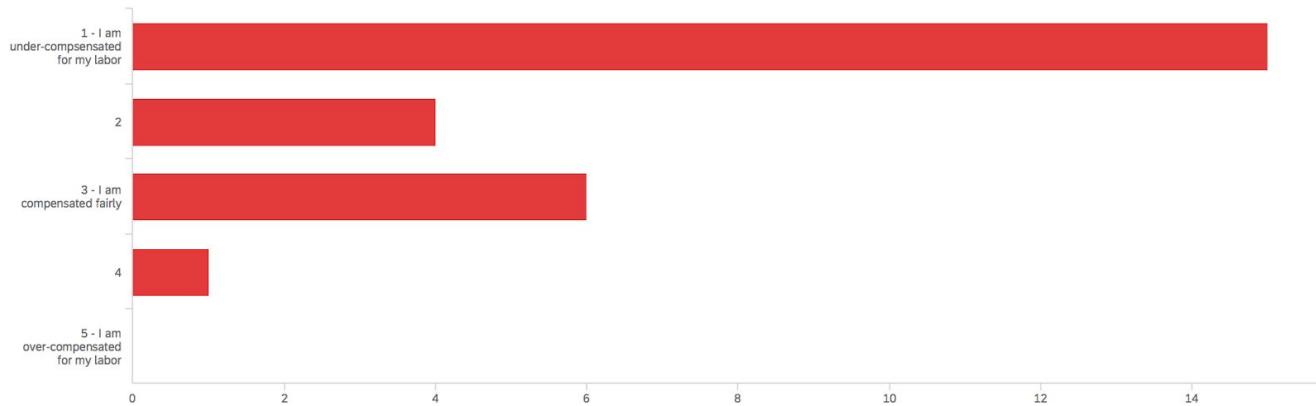
Two other notable trends emerged in student intern responses about compensation. First, some interns remarked that many of their coworkers hold multiple other paid positions on campus, which contribute in meeting student interns financial needs. This could influence student interns' perceptions of how fairly they are compensated for their labor. Many student interns also pointed out, importantly, that there are many student organizations doing uncompensated work to further EDI-related goals. Students who worked to establish and run organizations like FYRE, a pre-orientation program that provides a community for first-generation, low-income students are often underpaid or unpaid. Furthermore, there are affinity groups that provide community for students of marginalized identities, like SHADE, which is an affinity group for LGBTQ+ people of color, or ABHW, the Association of Black Harvard Womxn, where all of the students and organizers go unpaid for their work despite their labor advancing EDI-related goals.



*Fig 3: Student intern responses about perceptions of fair compensation.*

In typical circumstances, it appears that student interns believe they are compensated fairly. This perception drastically changed as a result of administrative changes in light of the COVID-19 epidemic, as student intern hours were cut from 10 hours per week to 3 hours per

week. This shift resulted in a significant discrepancy between how student interns felt about their compensation. One intern wrote that it appeared as if the EDI budget was in the first round of cuts, as other student workers across campus maintained work for the same number of hours as before the COVID-19 crisis, describing this observation as a “slap in the face,” as another wrote that the cut demonstrated “higher-ups at the University do not value their work enough.” Numerous interns explained that the hours cut presented a financial burden and disrupted their financial planning, noting that this cut impacted some of “the most marginalized groups of student workers.”

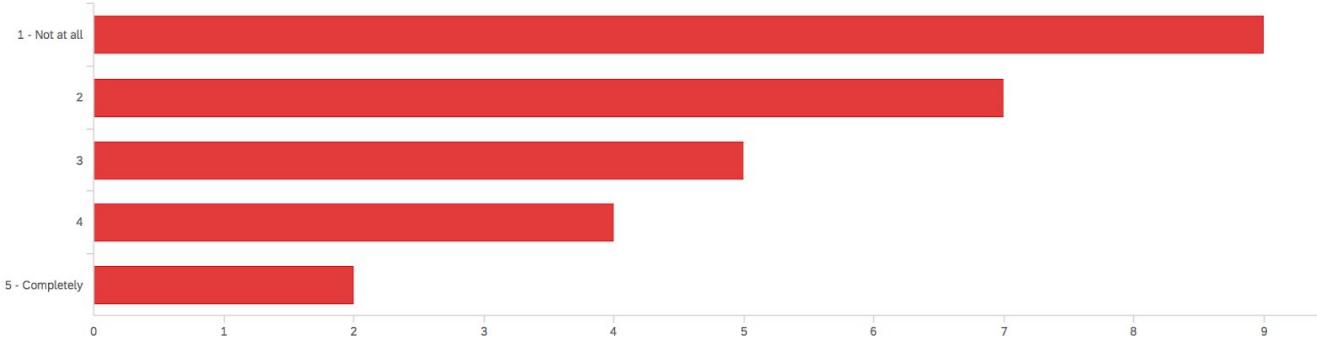


*Fig. 4: Student intern responses to the question “Taking Harvard’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic into account, how fairly do you believe you have been compensated for your labor?”*

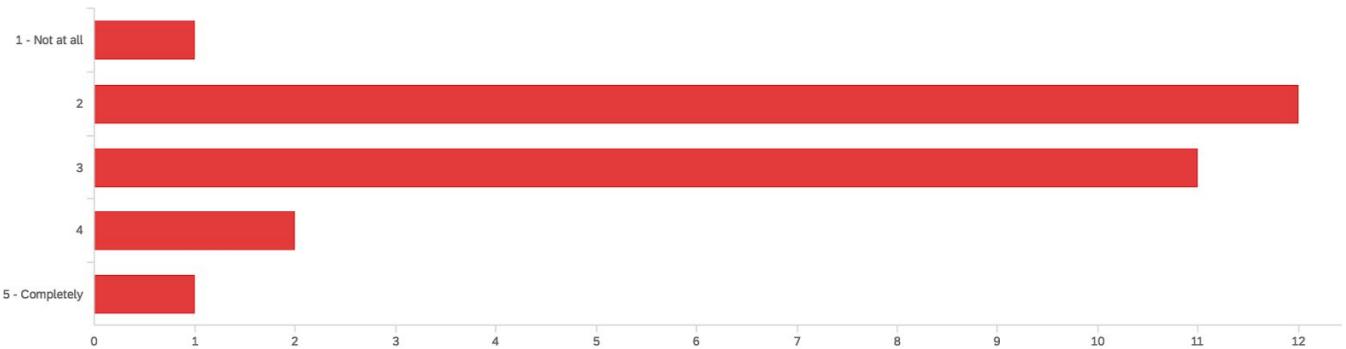
### Intern Mattering

Students were more likely to feel appreciated by Harvard than to feel that Harvard depended on them, although regardless of which metric related to mattering was being assessed, students had generally negative perceptions. Furthermore, students were in greater agreement about Harvard’s appreciation of student interns than about Harvard’s dependence on student interns. The bell curve-like shape of the results about appreciation are not significantly dissimilar

from intern responses about compensation, although student interns are in more clear agreement about compensation than appreciation.



*Fig. 5: Student intern responses to the question “How much do you believe Harvard’s administration depends on you?”*

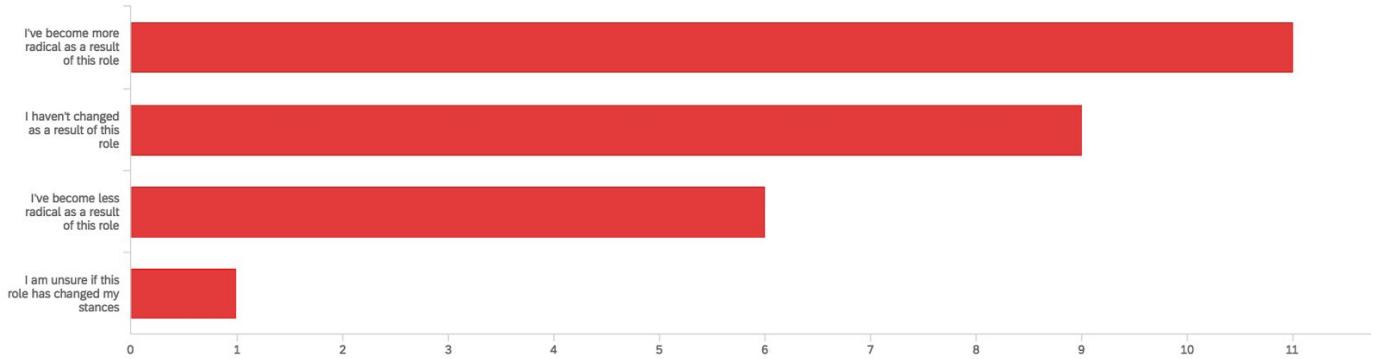


*Fig. 6: Student intern responses to the question “How much do you believe Harvard’s administration appreciates your work?*

#### Student Radicalization as a Result of Interning in EDI

40% of student interns reported a belief that their intern within Harvard’s EDI Offices resulted in them becoming more radical in the changes they sought on campus. One student wrote “I think the role did help me learn more about social justice and become more radical and better as an activist, especially in my first two years as an intern. After that, I did feel like

sometimes I wanted more radical change than I could achieve through this role. Overall though, it was a really good learning experience.”



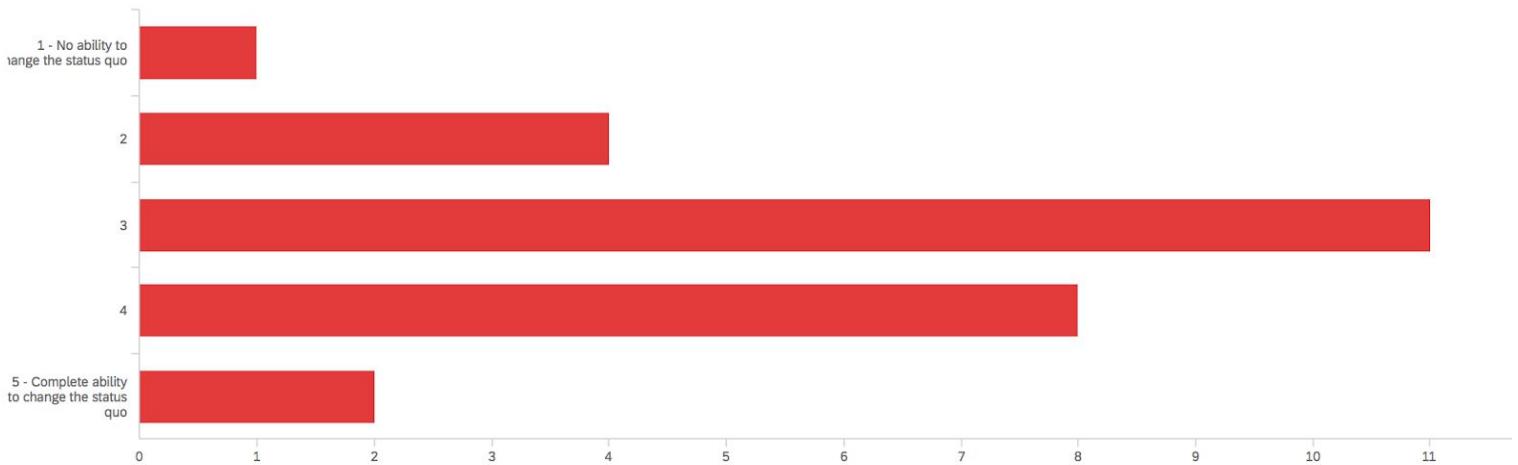
*Fig. 7: Student intern responses to the question “Do you think this intern role has made you more or less radical in the changes you seek on campus?”*

An intern at the Office for Diversity Education and Support, typically referred to as a Diversity Peer Educator (DPE), described observing students become “deradicalized” as a result of the role. They pointed out that student interns face “institutional boundaries” that restrict what they are allowed to speak out about as representatives of their role and, broadly, Harvard. For example, the DPEs were unable to speak out about the Harvard Crimson for contacting ICE for comment, even though this move potentially endangered a vulnerable student population that the DPEs are theoretically supposed advocate for and protect. This person explained that the Office for Diversity Education and Support “has strict rules about what we, as an office, decide to speak out against or in favor of.” This demonstrates a facet of intern work where students lose a significant amount of their agency, linked to the AUS scale in the realm of “opportunities to make choices.” Looking into how restrictions like this impact student interns, practically and psychologically, over the long run is another possible source of further exploration. Do student

interns feel like these restrictions force them to be disingenuous in their advocacy for the communities that they represent? How does that influence their work and well-being?

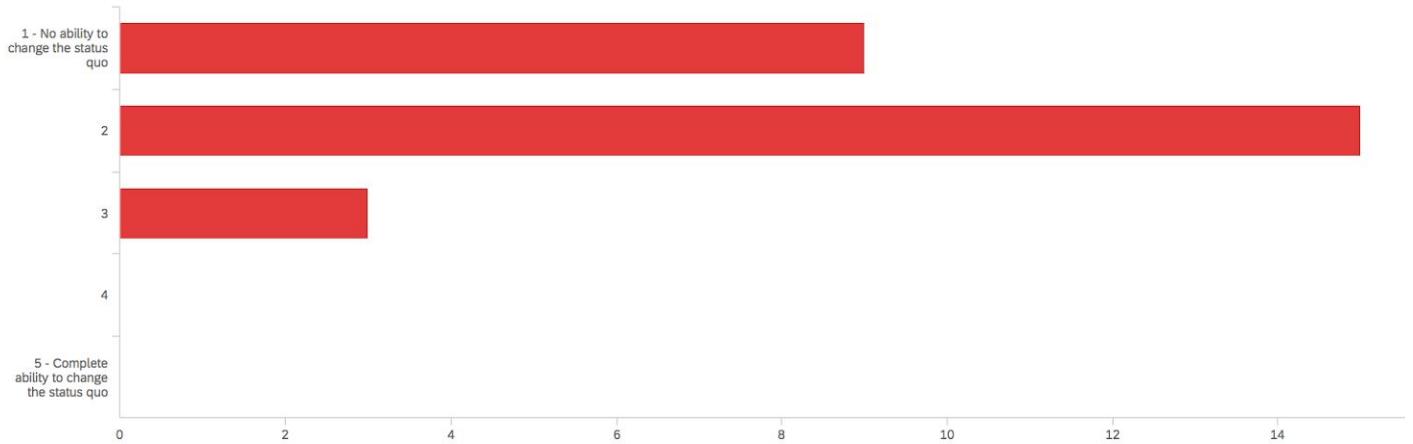
#### Perception of Agency and the Potential for Institutional Change

Just over 80% of interns reported a broadly optimistic stance on their ability to change the status quo at an office wide level, giving a response of 3, 4 or 5 on the 5-point Likert scale. A majority of students, 59%, reported a belief that the level of student-staff partnership in the decision-making process was that administrative staff make all of the decisions with some consideration of student voice; this metric reveals a general perception of moderate level of partnership and thus, agency. Students collectively reported a perception that their opinions were taken into consideration in the context of their office work approximately 60% of the time.



*Fig. 8: Student intern responses to the question “How much ability to change the status quo (at an office level) do you perceive your role to have?*

Interns' belief in their ability to change the status quo changed drastically when they were asked to evaluate their ability to make change at an institutional level:

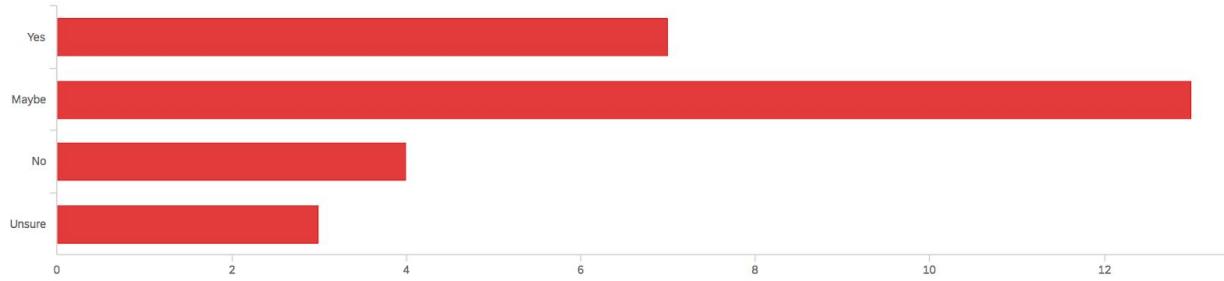


*Fig. 9: Student intern responses to the question “How much ability to change the status quo (at an institutional level) do you perceive your role to have?*

Interns were most confident in their ability to influence office programming and community-building through their role. Grant funding, raising awareness, and “providing space” for students of similar identities were aspects of life at Harvard that interns also felt their role allowed them to influence. One intern also mentioned the potential to be involved in the interview process during hiring searches. Three students expressed the view that their role didn’t allow them to change much or anything at all.

Interns were divided over if their role provided a platform that allowed them to more effectively create change compared to advocacy from outside of the institution. One intern described their work as “symbolic,” but another affirmed their belief that “as an EDI intern, I feel we have better access to the administration which allows us to give our opinions on policies/etc. easier,” a viewpoint that echoed by others. Just under one-third (8 out of 27) of respondents suggested improving the intern program by giving interns more influence in higher-level

decision-making, taking interns more seriously, or listening to concerns raised by student interns. Notably, only 23% of student interns said that they felt that the role gave them a greater ability to change the status quo.



*Fig. 9: Student intern responses to the question “Do you think you have greater ability to change the status quo as an intern in an EDI office compared to advocating for EDI-related causes as an independent student?”*

Survey responses were rich with student intern testimonials about institutional change. One intern wrote, “I have been dissatisfied and slightly surprised with the very little amount of change I've been able to create within the institution as compared to my prior experiences working outside the institution.” Another wrote, “what I first saw as "intern-focused" and giving more agency to the students began to become frustrating as myself and other interns felt we did not have the resources or support from higher-level admin to accomplish our work as best as possible.” Multiple students mentioned a component of community-building in their ability to make change, with one student saying “I knew this was a very bureaucratic office that focuses mostly on community building and not advocacy” and another describing how the role has been similar to their expectations in that “As far as my power to affect change on campus, [the role is] not [similar] at all. As far as the community and learning about how the administration works, [the role is] all I could have wished for.”

## **Discussion**

Because of the stark difference in response rates, this analysis will focus primarily on the answers from student interns with the hope that future explorations of Harvard's efforts related to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion will have more responsiveness from administrators.

### **Student Motivations for Working in EDI**

For many student workers, the necessity of income factors into the decision to work on campus. EDI interns, perhaps uniquely, cited the hope of finding community around an identity that they described as “shared” and “marginalized” with similar weight to the importance of a paid employment opportunity. Student perceptions of EDI intern work might be altered because of this shift in relationship with their employment position, especially given that many interns cited friendships and supportive coworkers as positive aspects of their work.

### **Compensation of Student Workers**

EDI interns seem satisfied with their compensation for the most part, although some students cited frustrations that a few years ago, before a series of raises, their compensation seemed inadequate. The changes in compensation resulting from the COVID-19 epidemic seem to be a source of frustration not only monetarily, but in the realm of student agency. Interns expressed frustration at the disruption to their financial planning, as well as the impracticalities of doing effective work given the dramatic cut to their time. Personally, I can say that the cut resulted in me doing many hours of unpaid labor, as a result of exceeding the 3-hour cap almost every week. At the end of the semester, I communicated this with my higher-ups and was able to receive back pay on some of this time, although while I was working I didn't believe I would

ever be paid for that time. For many interns, the financial impact of this decision was similarly frustrating to the implications of the institutional valuation of their work.

Interns were also quick to point out that there are many students spending ample time on campus furthering EDI-related goals without compensation, which begs questions about why intern labor is, on its face, valued more (or compensated better) than other forms of labor.

### Mattering

The data on student intern responses on appreciation, compared to responses on compensation, would support the assertion that the role feels symbolic in that Harvard financially shows appreciation while not making interns feel legitimately appreciated. The question of compensation as it relates to dependence and appreciation is a crucial one, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Compensation is conventionally representative of appreciation, but the sudden change in intern compensation in light of COVID-19, as some interns pointed out, demonstrates a lack of dependence. Besides this, the generally pessimistic responses about mattering are troubling. Student interns' limited belief in their ability to change the status quo through their role coupled with this doubt about mattering to the institution demonstrates a limited degree of student agency.

### Student Radicalization as a Result of Interning in EDI

The variance in responses to the question of intern radicalization demonstrates a potential for further exploration in this area. Why students have become more or less radical as a result of their EDI work is unclear based on the results of the survey, which covered the topic in the single question posed in Fig. 5. Possible explanations might include the intern program giving student workers a better understanding of Harvard's bureaucratic mechanisms, frustration from working

within the administration, or a clearer desire for specific improvements the College could make as a result of interacting with Harvard's administration more closely. Feelings of limited mattering and ability to change the status quo might also play a role in student radicalization. Past intern trainings have had distinct emphasis on the importance of gradual, incremental change, and identifying the impact of this rhetoric on the student interns might provide more insight into the question of student intern radicalization.

#### Perception of Agency and the Potential for Institutional Change

Student interns were generally in agreement that creating change at an Office-wide level felt possible. This was not the case at an institutional level. Accordingly, it appears that student interns have agency at an office-wide level, but not on an institutional level. This data was also reflected in student intern responses about how they perceived their immediate higher-ups (such as the Assistant Director and Director of their office) valued their work compared to how they perceived distant higher-ups (such as the Dean of Students or the Dean of Harvard College) valued their work.

Although student interns aptly identified certain areas where they felt their role allowed them to have influence, all of these have limitations. The student interviewing panel is unlikely to be the deciding factor in a personnel search. Programming only impacts the students who attend programs. One student explained that only students who were already involved in the community or interested in the issues that EDI interns advocate for are the ones who show up to events. In other words, it is practically guaranteed that the most homophobic student will not attend an event hosted by the BGLTQ Office, although this student learning at a BGLTQ Office event might be ultimately beneficial for the community. Additionally, most students identified a

specific one or two things that their role allowed them to influence, but no intern described a broad scope of influence afforded to them by the role. This view seems solidified by general doubt, albeit disagreement about formal decision-making powers afforded by the role.

Students had differing desires related to institutional change before beginning work at their respective offices; some interns didn't have hopes of creating change on campus, instead prioritizing goals like creating formative community spaces. Other interns expected they would have an easier time making change, and were disappointed and surprised when this was not the case.

The lack of clarity for student interns on whether they believe they have more agency working within the bureaucracy than outside of the bureaucracy is an aspect of this project where it is especially disappointing that administrative response was so low. Administrators offer unique insight into the question of effectiveness of advocacy from outside and inside the institution. Whether administrators have a clear answer to this question, whether it depends on certain circumstances, or whether the answer is purposefully opaque is unclear.

Moreover, how do the experiences of the student interns compare with student interns in other Harvard Offices? Is it especially stressful or burdensome to work within EDI? How do other student workers perceive their agency and compensation? Has working at Harvard shifted their politics?

### **Recommendations**

Informed by the results of this survey, I have devised a set of policy recommendations to improve the EDI intern program as well as to further EDI goals at Harvard outside of the program.

1. Increase Compensation, not of the student interns in EDI, but of other unpaid student labor that is important to EDI-related goals

Student interns generally believe, with some notable exceptions, that they are fairly compensated for their labor, so, perhaps counterintuitively, raising the pay of EDI interns should not necessarily be a priority. However, this result cannot be understood without the important caveat that many student interns described other roles on campus that went uncompensated or under-compensated.

Thus, one of the best initiatives the College should consider to further EDI-related goals at Harvard is the compensation of other students putting in labor to further EDI goals. As mentioned by some student interns, student organizers who paved the way for the FYRE pre-orientation program went unpaid and then underpaid for many months. At present, the group of students running FYRE is still not paid an hourly wage, and many who do work for FYRE are not paid at all.

It would not be overly difficult or costly for the College to institute a program that compensates students for EDI-related work outside of EDI Offices. A streamlined application process could determine which student organizations should be given a special EDI-designated status, which would make them eligible for funding. Paying 2 student leaders in 20 different student groups for 10 hours of weekly EDI-related work would cost the College only \$60,000 for a 10-week semester, a fraction of any given EDI Office's budget. This solution would not significantly alter the EDI Intern program, but it would address a problem that many interns identified.

Based on changes to EDI work during the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become clear the importance of compensating student laborers doing EDI-related work within the offices, as well.

Even though giving EDI interns a raise might not be the most necessarily solution at present, interns should absolutely have their typical work hours reinstated if the current situation persists. Student responses about how fairly their labor has been compensated given Harvard's COVID-19 response were starkly different, which can almost entirely be explained by how intern hours were cut. Students commented that this has resulted in them doing significantly more unpaid labor for the institution. Given the continuation of digital schooling in future semesters, it is imperative that EDI interns are allowed to work their typical hours.

## 2. Increase Intern Involvement and Transparency in Higher Level Decision-Making

The opaque decision-making process outside of their particular office is a source of frustration amongst student interns. As one intern described, "all levels of power higher than our assistant director function as a black box." This sentiment was echoed by other interns who expressed their desire to change their limited ability to interact with administrators outside of the office within which they work. Another manifestation of this phenomenon was apparent through the lack of clarity about whether or not interns think the role has given them a greater ability to influence Harvard as compared to advocating for change as an independent student.

If it is the case that student interns have greater ability to influence Harvard through these roles, interns have suggested a few strategies in order to make this more clear. The first would be to give student interns more consistent meetings and otherwise increase face-to-face interactions between student employees and higher-ups, such as Deans, in Harvard's administration. The second would be to increase transparency and communication with student interns about how and why decisions are made above the level of the office within which they work. Based on survey results, limited transparency in decision-making has resulted in student workers assuming

that they have limited or no influence in administrative decisions outside of their individual office's scope. Communicating administrative decisions in greater detail would allow student interns to see where their voices are being represented, if at all.

More involvement in the decision-making process could make interns feel more needed by the institution, as well, thus increasing feelings of mattering described by Schlossberg (1989). The survey reveals that at present, interns largely feel unneeded, or as one intern put it, "symbolic." Another intern commented, "it seems like we're not really meant to interact with [higher-level administrators] at all even though we work for them." Some perceived a lack of trust from administrators as the cause of this phenomenon, to which one intern responded, "we want to feel like trusted thought partners so we can do our job better."

3. Find Authentic Demonstrations of the Importance of the EDI Interns/Offices to Develop Mattering

In addition to greater involvement in the decision-making process, administrators outside of the EDI Offices must find clearer ways to demonstrate that the EDI interns matter. EDI interns rarely interact with higher-level administration, and if they do, it is not to work together. This can and should be changed. The value of student interns must be demonstrated through more means than just the compensation of the work that they do.

4. Reevaluate Student/Staff Dynamics with the Goal of Achieving Partnership

Taking the Healy et. al. (2014) findings and applying this to our definition of agency, it becomes clear that a model of student/staff partnership would be ideal for preserving student agency. The results show that students feel like administrators make decisions with some consideration of their voice, meaning that there remains significant room for improvement in establishing student/staff partnership. This could look like more frequent meetings with students

soliciting input, or student interns working alongside administrators from start to finish on a given event, program, or initiative. Furthermore, expanding the decision-making powers of student interns would further student/staff partnership, so that students no longer feel like their voices are just a “consideration,” but are instead crucial. It should not be uncommon that the opinion of student interns changes the course of decision-making in a particular office.

#### 5. Increase Collaboration Between Intern Teams in Different Offices

Another untapped potential in the internship program is the possibility of cross-office collaboration, events, and socials. At present this only happens occasionally. Many interns named finding a community of individuals who shared similar passions as something that drew them to the role or turned out to be one of the strongest parts of the intern program. This might look like large-scale events co-hosted by the two offices or intern teams from multiple offices working on joint projects. A shift like this will also place greater emphasis on the importance of intersectionality in EDI-related work. As is, the separation of offices creates artificial distance between certain parts of an individual's identity – for example, although the Office of BGLTQ Student Life does programming related to the intersection of race and sexuality, there remains a clear administrative distinction between the offices designated to address issues of race and the office designated to address issues of sexuality. Greater collaboration between offices can reinforce administrative understanding of students holding complex, intersectional identities.

#### **Conclusion**

The involvement of students in Harvard's efforts to expand Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion is crucial, as is the compensation of this particular kind of work. However, compensation is not enough to create long-lasting change that improves Harvard's efforts in this

field. Student interns must feel like they have the ability to create change outside of just their office, they must be partners with administrators, they must feel depended on, and they must know that they matter to the institution.

It is a common symptom of working within an expansive bureaucracy to feel limited in what institutional changes are possible. That said, it would be worth exploring whether or not the disparity between perceptions of Office-level and Institution-level change is especially stark in the realm of EDI. The data collected through this project builds a foundation for exploring questions of agency, compensation, and radicalization specifically in the realm of EDI. A logical next step would be to collect more data from other offices and compare with the EDI branch.

The intersection of technocratic creep, as described by Boyte (2008), and EDI-related work is another question that should be examined further, both in the Harvard context and beyond. How do respectability politics alter advocacy for marginalized identities? What does this phenomenon look like in an administrative body? How does technocratic creep manifest itself in these spaces, and what impact does that have? A good starting point for this might be the restrictions on what student interns are allowed to speak about as representatives of their role.

Other areas for exploration were revealed by the survey, as well. How and why EDI interns believe that the role has radicalized them would be an interesting area for exploration. Finding out more information on the administrative side about the possibilities for change through the EDI intern role compared to external advocacy would be insightful.

Adapting to changing societal landscapes is not uncommon for a school that has existed for centuries. The Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion branch of the Dean of Students Office is a notable facet of Harvard's adaptation to the late 20th and 21st century. But these offices are not

static, and as demonstrated by the responses from student interns, there are changes to these offices that can validate and advance EDI-related goals at Harvard. More students besides just the EDI interns must be acknowledged and valued for their work. The EDI branch must matter. The possibilities for institutional change might appear limited, but with clear, explicit effort, shifts are certainly possible.

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