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U.S. | U.S. EDUCATION NEWS

Harvard Stands Behind Its President, Claudine Gay, After New Plagiarism Allegations

Gay will update her Ph.D. dissertation, but school calls newest claims meritless



Harvard faces criticism that it holds its President Claudine Gay's work to a different standard than it applies to its students. PHOTO: KEVIN DIETSCH/GETTY IMAGES

By *Melissa Korn* [Follow](#)

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Harvard University is continuing to support its president, Claudine Gay, amid a fresh round of accusations that she plagiarized other academics throughout her career. The newest charges have amplified questions about her research integrity and position at the helm of the prestigious Ivy League institution.

Gay will update her Ph.D. dissertation to add attributions for material in three spots, the school said Wednesday night, but again she was cleared of research misconduct by a board subcommittee.

The school also said that it received an anonymous complaint earlier in the week providing dozens of additional instances of alleged plagiarism, but that most had already been reviewed, and the four that were new were deemed to be “without merit.”

Harvard provided the new details about the review of Gay's work as it faces criticism that it was holding Gay to a different standard than it does for its own students, and that its review

didn't follow school protocol.

Gay didn't immediately respond to a message seeking comment on the latest review of her past work.

The Harvard Corporation, the university's top governing board, reaffirmed its support for Gay, the school's first Black president, last week in the wake of an appearance before a House committee to discuss antisemitism on college campuses. In that statement, the board said that it learned of allegations regarding three articles in late October, and that Gay requested her published work undergo an independent review.

For that review, the board established a four-person board subcommittee and brought on three independent scholars, the school said Wednesday. They determined it would be a potential conflict for the Faculty of Arts and Sciences Research Integrity Office, which usually investigates concerns about misconduct like plagiarism, to oversee the review since the staff there ultimately report to the president.



A truck displaying criticism of Claudine Gay drove around Harvard University earlier this month. PHOTO: JOSEPH PREZIOSO/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

The initial review determined Gay's published papers hadn't violated Harvard's standards for research misconduct, though there were "a few instances of inadequate citation," the board said last week.

On Wednesday evening, the school added that there were instances that didn't adhere to the Harvard Guide to Using Sources. Gay subsequently requested four corrections in two academic articles, to add quotation marks and citations for specific material.

"Neither the independent panel nor the board subcommittee found evidence of intentional deception or recklessness in Gay's work, which is a required element for a determination of research misconduct" under the governing policy, the school said Wednesday, calling the

inadequate citations regrettable.

On Wednesday, the House Committee on Education and the Workforce opened a review of how Harvard has handled the allegations of plagiarism.

Rep. Virginia Foxx (R., N.C.), the chair of the committee, sent a letter to Penny Pritzker, who leads the school's governing board. The letter quotes from the school's honor code that says "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."

"Does Harvard hold its faculty—and its own president—to the same standards?" Foxx asked in the letter.

The committee is requesting that Harvard hand over all documentation and communications concerning the initial allegations of plagiarism, the school's responses to the media, as well as a list of disciplinary actions taken against Harvard faculty or students for academic integrity violations since 2019.

Harvard also suffered a blow to its fundraising this week when the family foundation of investor Len Blavatnik paused donations to the university following Gay's comments at the congressional hearing about antisemitism on campus, according to a person familiar with the matter.

A Harvard Business School alumnus, Blavatnik is chairman and founder of Access Industries, a global investment firm in real estate, media, biotechnology and other industries with a portfolio valued at over \$35 billion, according to its website. His family foundation has donated more than \$270 million to Harvard, including about \$200 million to its medical school, the person said Thursday. The news of the pause in donations was earlier reported by Bloomberg.

Gay faced additional plagiarism allegations, from conservative activist Christopher Rufo and writer Christopher Brunet, that she plagiarized parts of her 1997 Ph.D. dissertation, "Taking Charge: Black Electoral Success and the Redefinition of American Politics."

The school said the subcommittee reviewed those allegations and found one instance that had already been identified in a published paper, as well as two other examples of what the school called "duplicative language without appropriate attribution." The independent panel wasn't part of that review.

Gay will add citations to her dissertation, the school said.

The latest round of allegations, which came via an anonymous complaint to the school and were earlier reported by the Washington Free Beacon, a conservative political journalism website, included dozens of instances in which Gay allegedly pulled material or even exact phrasing from other publications without proper citation.

The university said nearly all of those instances had already been reviewed during the earlier investigation of Gay’s published work, and the four new ones were deemed by the subcommittee to be meritless.

Claudine Gay was accused of plagiarism. Below, three passages that have been called into question.

Example one	
“Fighting Poverty, Mobilizing Voters: Housing Investment and Political Participation”	“The low income housing tax credit and racial segregation”
Claudine Gay LIHTC program guidelines provide higher tax credit amounts to projects developed in areas designated by HUD as ‘qualified census tracts,’ defined as tracts where at least 50 percent of the households have incomes below 60 percent of their metropolitan area’s median family income or where the poverty rate exceeds 25 percent	Keren Horn & Katherine O’Regan Projects that are built in qualified Census tracts (QCTs), defined as neighborhoods where at least 50 percent of the households have incomes below 60 percent of their metropolitan area’s median family income , receive a 30 percent bonus in their qualified basis.
<i>A 2014 working paper by Gay includes language describing the Low Income Housing Tax Credit that is similar to phrasing in a 2011 paper by Keren Horn and Katherine O’Regan. Gay doesn’t cite them as sources in this section of her paper.</i>	

Example two	
“Moving to Opportunity: The Political Effects of a Housing Mobility Experiment”	“Moving to Opportunity for Fair Housing Demonstration Program Interim Impacts Evaluation”
Claudine Gay Thus the TOT effects, unlike the ITT effects, are nonexperimental, in the sense that they are not directly observed for whole randomly	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development The TOT estimates are non-experimental, in

assigned groups	the sense that they are not directly observed for whole randomly assigned groups
<p><i>A 2012 Urban Affairs Review article by Gay described an experimental design in terms that echoed a description from a 2003 Department of Housing and Urban Development report. Gay references the report in a parenthetical at the end of the following paragraph, but doesn't directly tie her description to that source or use quotation marks.</i></p>	

Example three	
“A Room for One’s Own? The Partisan Allocation of Affordable Housing”	“Low-income housing development and crime”
<p>Claudine Gay</p> <p>I also construct a county-level measure that captures the financial incentives developers have to build or rehabilitate affordable housing in the most impoverished places (Hollar and Usowski 2007).</p> <p>As QCT coverage increases, so does the ability of developers to take advantage of the larger tax credit by siting new housing in the county.</p>	<p>Matthew Freedman and Emily Owens</p> <p>As an instrument for low-income housing development, we construct a county-level measure that captures the incentives developers have to build or rehabilitate affordable housing in certain tracts.</p> <p>As QCT coverage increases, however, so does the ability of developers to take advantage of the larger tax credit.</p>
<p><i>Gay describes her methodology and some analysis in a 2017 article from Urban Affairs Review in nearly identical language to that used by Matthew Freedman and Emily Owens in a 2011 paper. Gay thanks the authors in an endnote for letting her use their data, but doesn't cite them in these paragraphs. Harvard said Gay has submitted corrections on this article to add quotation marks and citations to Freedman and Owens' work, and to another 2011 academic paper by Anne Williamson.</i></p>	

The Harvard Corporation subcommittee determined no further action was required beyond the corrections to the dissertation and to the published papers announced last week.

The school declined to say which members of the 12-person Harvard Corporation were on the

subcommittee. Multiple board members have experience in academia, including former Princeton University President Shirley Tilghman, former Amherst College President Carolyn “Biddy” Martin, and Mariano-Florentino Cuéllar, a former California Supreme Court justice who was on the Stanford Law School faculty for two decades.

—Douglas Belkin and Peter Grant contributed to this article.

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Corrections & Amplifications

Carolyn “Biddy” Martin is a former president of Amherst College. An earlier version of this article incorrectly said she was the school’s current president. (Corrected on Dec. 21)

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