

Raced-based admissions in higher education essay sample

[Sociology](#), [Racism](#)



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In 1992, a young White woman by the name of Cheryl Hopwood applied to the University of Texas Law School. Although she had above average LSAT scores and a good undergraduate grade point average, she was denied admission. Four years later Hopwood, along with four other plaintiffs, filed a lawsuit against the University of Texas Law School for reverse discrimination (Savage). This was the first case to challenge race-based admissions since the 1978 Supreme Court Ruling that race could be used as a factor in considering admissions. Furthermore, the Hopwood case has pushed the critical examination of affirmative action into the forefront. Affirmative action is a term used to describe the laws and social policies that are implemented as a means to alleviate discrimination that limits opportunities of various racial groups (Crosby p. 587). It was created to end discrimination and promote equal opportunity in education and work (Crosby p. 588). In order to increase the amount of minorities on college campuses, universities began to consider race as a factor in their admissions decisions. The decision to include race as a factor in admissions is controversial.

Many arguments for affirmative action in college admissions argue on behalf of the universities' goals and aspirations. However, college students also gain educational benefits from race-based admissions policies. The first case to challenge race-based admissions was the 1978 Regents of the University of California v. Bakke (Bowen and Bok p. 10). However, recently there have been many lawsuits filed against universities' admissions policies. For example, in addition to the 1996 case of Hopwood v. State of Texas, the University of Michigan was also sued. In 1997, the Center for Individual Rights (CIR), a Washington, DC based civil rights organization, filed a lawsuit

against the University of Michigan on behalf of two White students who were denied admission to the school's undergraduate program (Pettypiece). The CIR also filed a lawsuit on behalf of three other White students who were denied admission to the University of Washington. Many of these lawsuits claim that the plaintiffs were denied admission under a system that gave preferences to some groups of students because of their race (Pettypiece).

People who opposed race-admission policies have several reasons why they feel this type of policy should be banned. One reason is a moral argument that society should be colorblind. Opponents argue that focusing on racial difference is wrong and can aggravate racial tensions on campus (Bowen and Bock p. 56). Ward Connerly, a University of California Board of Regents member and opponent to race-based admissions, states that this type of policy perpetuates racial inequality (Connerly B6). However, this argument assumes that all people are treated equally and judged on merit (Dovidio and Gaertner p. 4). It fails to address that discrimination and racism still exists today (Dovidio and Gaertner p. 6). Another argument against race-based admissions is that less qualified students are admitted into college in order to fill a quota. Opponents argue that admitting minority students who are less qualified is more costly and requires universities to implement more remedial programs and special services to help these students adjust to college (Altbach, Lomotey, and Kyle p. 460). However, the assumption that minority students are less qualified and require more remedial services is a racial stereotype. In fact, most minority students who apply to colleges are highly qualified (Bowen and Bock p. 19).

Furthermore, race-based admission is not a quota system. It is a system that takes racial background into account in conjunction with many other criteria (Bowen and Bock p. 24). There are many other reasons why people oppose race-based admissions. These arguments against this policy have led to question its constitutionality. Although the constitutionality of race-based admissions has yet to come up to the Supreme Court, it is important to keep in mind the reason for why this type of policy was implemented in the first place. That is, the educational value of a diverse campus needs to be addressed. One of the educational benefits of race-based admissions is that it increases the number of racially diverse students on a college campus. For example, in the 20 years that this policy has been implemented at universities, there has been a steady increase in the number of minority students enrolling in college (Bowen and Bock p. 16). In fact, at universities who have done away with race-based admissions, such as the University of Texas at Austin, the number of minorities enrolled decreased. For example, in 1996, the University of Texas at Austin stopped using race-based admissions. That year the minority student enrollment dropped from 16. 2% of the student population to 14. 8%.

Enrollment of Black students dropped 90 percent (Pettypiece). The decrease was more dramatic at the University of Texas Law School where the Black freshman enrollment dropped from 31 students in 1996 to 4 students in 1997. Another educational benefit to college students is that studies have shown that a diverse campus contributes to better academic outcomes. In 1999, Gurin conducted a study of the educational benefits of college

students who attended a diverse college campuses. Gurin found that White students, as well as minority students, reported higher levels of “ diverse ideas and information” (Gurin p. 10). Gurin also found in his study that students from diverse college campuses were more likely to show growth in their “ active thinking processes” (Gurin p. 10). That is, college students from diverse campuses scored higher test scores in complex thinking and social thinking than those from a more homogenous college campus. These students also had “ higher levels of intellectual engagement and motivation” (Gurin p. 21). Lastly, these students were more likely to aspire to go to graduate school (Gurin p. 23).

As seen in Gurin’s study, college students from diverse campuses gained educational benefits. Another educational benefit is that minority students are more likely to stay in college when they in a diverse college campus. One study found that African American students who attended a diverse campus reported more positive experiences (Bowen and Bock p. 55). Furthermore, these students were more likely to graduate from college than those from non-diverse college campuses (Bowen and Bock p. 61). In 1999, Chang conducted a study what also looked at the educational benefits of attending a diverse college campus. Chang surveyed 11, 688 college students from 371 four-year colleges and universities (Chang p. 380). His study found that college students from diverse campuses were more likely to discuss racial issues. He also found the students were more likely to socialize with someone of a different race (Chang p. 391). Students were also found to be more open to different cultures and had a greater appreciation of different

cultures. Students from diverse campuses felt that they were intelligent and had better social confidence (Chang p. 392). Chang states that his study shows that increasing the number of minority students at colleges and universities expands opportunities for more minority students to enroll.

He also states that diverse campuses “ enhance the educational experience of all students” (Chang p. 319). Orfeld and Whitla’s study also found a diverse campus to have educational benefits for college students. They did a study on Harvard and University of Michigan law school students. Their study found that 90% of the participants said that their exposure to diversity had a positive impact on their law school experience (Orfeld and Whitla p. 45).

Over half of the students reported that diversity improved the in-class discussions. About 62% of the students stated that diversity improved their ability to get along with people from different cultures other than their own (Orfeld and Whitla p. 47). Finally, about 80% of the students reported that their discussions with students from different races affected their views of the criminal justice system (Orfeld and Whitla p. 51).

From the 1978 Regents of the University of California v. Bakke case to today’s Hopwood case, the challenge of race-based admissions has been played out in the court system and continues to be a controversial issue. However, what has been lost in the arguments are the educational benefits of a diverse college campus for students. In analyzing the arguments against race-based admissions, we find that there are assumptions made about equality and often stereotypic thinking that define the opponent’s arguments. The research presented in this paper supports race-sensitive

admissions and its educational value. Examining the arguments of several well-respected scholars, it appears clear that support for race-based admissions is logically grounded and should not be ignored.

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