Affirmative Action in College admissions
Sociology 220
Prof. Pamela Oliver

Put your answer on your lecture comment page now before you hear the lecture

- Guess:
  - % of each racial group among UW undergrads: White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, American Indian, International
  - Of those who apply, what percent are accepted, by race? That is, if you are White, Black, Hispanic, Asian American, American Indian, International, what are your chances of getting in? (#accepted/#applied)
  - Why do you think what you think?

Using Race: Two Kinds of Pro Arguments which imply different interest groups & values

- Disadvantage: Students from racial/ethnic minority backgrounds are disadvantaged, deserve compensation
- Diversity: The school needs to be more diverse for the benefit of everyone
- These two kinds of arguments are different from each other in their policy implications and interests, values, rhetoric, relevant “facts”
- Problem: Court cases have forced discussion onto the diversity terrain, leading to confusing discussions

ANTI Value: Using race is just wrong

- Some people object to anything that mentions race no matter what the facts are
- They are ok with other factors being considered, just not race.
- E.g., current Supreme Court case. No evidence that race had anything to do with plaintiff Abigail Fisher not getting into U Texas. Suit objects to race even being mentioned as a possible factor
- Disputes about whether this is just a cover for self-interest or a genuine principle.

Diversity arguments

- Inherent educational value in a culturally mixed environment (Value)
- Similar to wanting a diversity of majors, talents: you don’t want all math majors or all violin players
- The majority benefits from diversity. **
- Everyone should learn how to function in a multicultural society. (Value)
- Implied Vision: Everyone has equal educational opportunity, but people are distributed across schools to make them all equally diverse
Diversity dispute
- Value of racial/ethnic diversity
- As a good in itself (value)
- As promoting social integration (factual claim)
- Whether it is beneficial to the majority to experience diversity
- As a value, in and of itself
- As a factual claim, helps in business etc.
- Ignore issue of competition for slots in selective schools
- Notice issue of why and whether some schools are “better”
- Treatment of international students and non-disadvantaged minorities
- Adds to diversity
- Not counted in “disadvantage” considerations

Individual Disadvantage
- Resources, income
  - Enrichment opportunities
  - Don’t have to work part-time → more time to study or do extracurriculars
- Parents’ education
  - Vocabulary
  - Knowing the academic ropes
  - Help with homework, writing essays & applications
- Networks: knowing the right people for internships, information on how to do things

Group Disadvantage
- Historical Discrimination
- Residential Segregation
- Media Images and Prejudice Today

- parents less educated
- Parents fewer financial resources
- Others treat you as less able, makes you doubt yourself and perform less well (stereotype threat)
- Poorer schools
- Fewer enrichment opportunities

Your “qualifications”

Disadvantage & UNDERREPRESENTATION
- Underrepresented Groups
- Individually Disadvantaged

Advantage & Representation Interest Groups

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<th>Over-represented (Group Advantage)</th>
<th>Under-Represented (Group Disadvantage)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual advantage</td>
<td>Advantaged Whites &amp; Asians (&amp; some Latinos)</td>
<td>Advantaged Blacks, Latinos*, Natives (&amp; SE Asians)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual disadvantage</td>
<td>Disadvantaged Whites &amp; Asians (&amp; some Latinos)</td>
<td>Disadvantaged Blacks, Latinos*, Natives (&amp; SE Asians)</td>
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* South Americans often not counted as underrepresented
Individual disadvantage argument
- Ignore race-ethnicity for now
- Individual disadvantage argument: your grades & school quality are affected by parents’ education & income, obscures your true merit
- Educational system should not just perpetuate inequality but help to correct it.
- NOTE: Value claim.
- Not everyone agrees.
- Some think it is good for elites to be able to preserve their children’s position in society.

Language & rhetoric
- Should disadvantaged people or people from disadvantaged groups be given an advantage in college admissions?
- VS
- Should people from privileged groups be allowed to benefit from their privilege in college admissions?

Individual Advantage Issues - 1
- Two students, Alpha and Beta
  - Both got a 26 on the ACT (or 1200 on the SAT), which is roughly 75th - 80th percentile,
  - Both have GPA’s of 3.8 with comparable courses at the same large public high school,
  - Both have comparable activities,
  - Both wrote adequate but not outstanding essays
- So Alpha and Beta are “the same” in qualifications
- (Assume they are the same race. We are just looking at qualifications.)

Individual Advantage - 2
- Alpha’s parents have master’s & PhD with professional occupations. Alpha took summer enrichment courses and took private test preparation courses that helped raise her score on the ACT/SAT.
- Beta’s parents are a high school drop out & a high school graduate who hold blue collar jobs. Beta worked at Burger King summers & after school for four years and could not afford a test preparation course.
- Questions:
  - Who probably has a higher level of native ability & intelligence?
  - Who is more “deserving” in terms of merit and achievement?

Individual disadvantage - 3
- Proponents: overcoming disadvantage is, itself, a sign of merit in calculating “qualification”.
  - i.e. you should get “points” for being disadvantaged.
  - Emphasis on opportunities for disadvantaged, assumes the advantaged will do OK anyway.
- Opponents: advantage has created true merit that should be rewarded (value)
  - OR “It’s not my fault I’m privileged. Why should I have to lose MY place?” (interest)
- Factual dispute: whether disadvantaged people have the capacity to do well in selective schools.
- Interests: do you think you personally will benefit or lose from a given scheme?
Disadvantage & Underrepresentation

Special Issues
- International students – left out of the scheme (add to diversity but don't count as disadvantaged)
- S.E. Asian groups often counted as underrepresented, e.g. in Wisconsin
- Asians are generally overrepresented, but some studies find discrimination against them relative to Whites
- Jews are overrepresented but may experience discrimination
- Some Whites may be counted as underrepresented, e.g. Appalachian, Upper Peninsula of Michigan, Northern Wisconsin, rural

“Objective” admission criteria and interests: The Problem of Multi-dimensionality
- Factors affected by school quality & context:
  - GPA, Class rank, # of AP, IB & enrichment courses taken
  - Being from a “good school” with a rigorous curriculum
  - Being a “school leader” or having an extensive record of community service
- SAT or ACT scores
- Vocabulary & grammar easier if parents speak “educated English”
- Ability to afford private test prep courses
- Factors affected by personal advantage:
  - International travel or other “broadening” experiences
  - Opportunity to develop advanced musical, athletic or other extraordinary talent in some area (Athletic opportunities vary by sport)
- Overcoming disadvantage:
  - Being from a group that is underrepresented at that school
  - Social policies that improve education in high school for disadvantaged people to raise their test scores & academic preparation to be comparable to those from advantaged people

Group interest in representation
- Minority communities “need” more highly-educated people: this is a social good that goes beyond the deservingness of any particular individual.
- Individually advantaged members of disadvantaged groups are assets to everyone in the group: multiplier effects
- Whites are very unlikely to provide medical, legal, business, educational services to segregated minority communities
- Role model & cultural competence issues: who does a better job of teaching minority children?

Group disadvantage arguments
- Factual claims about the reality of past & current discrimination & segregation against minorities
- Factual claims about context, e.g. Minorities (especially Blacks) of “the same” individual economic level tend to have poorer relatives & neighbors and worse educational facilities due to segregation + history
- Value disputes about whether history/context ought to matter beyond individual factors
- Interests: do you think you will benefit or lose from a particular set of “rules”
Group disadvantage: opponents
- Group factors irrelevant: only individuals matter
- Cite examples of genuinely privileged people who received “minority” preference
- Factual disputes invoke reality of mixed-parentage and fluid boundaries (you can check the “minority” box even if you look & live White)
- Concerns about impact on their own interests

College Admissions: Values
- Equality: procedural vs. substantive
- Justice: overcoming past wrongs vs. present treatment
- Cultural diversity in education as a value
- Benefits to majority of encountering minorities
- Benefits to minorities of encountering majorities
- Meritocracy as a value
- Individual claims vs. group claims
- Whether society as a whole should have more racial/ethnic (or class) equality

Factual disputes about disadvantage
- Whether there is still a legacy of disadvantage and ongoing discrimination
- Studies of job market & housing discrimination: affect options for children
- Effects of background on achievement
- Whether prejudice and stereotypes hurts the performance of even “advantaged” minority students
- Whether disadvantaged Whites are comparable to disadvantaged minorities
- Impact of policies on disadvantaged Whites

Factual disputes about admissions
- How admission procedures actually work: admitted “on the basis of race” vs. “one factor among many.” Claims about other admission factors (e.g. alumni preferences)
- Claims and counterclaims about “quotas” versus “targets”
- What the racial/ethnic composition of college classes actually is
- College enrollment rates vs. high school graduation rates

Factual Disputes about Qualifications
- Pro-advocates claim students given admission preference are well-qualified, anti-advocates say they are not
- Sub-debate about whether standardized test scores (which favor Whites and East Asians) are a valid “qualification”
- Sub-debate about overcoming disadvantage as evidence of qualification
- Sub-debate about qualifications and deservingness of disadvantaged Whites

Factual Disputes about Outcomes
- Graduation rates and reasons for non-completion (ability vs. financial strain, campus climate)
- Recent study showing lower graduation rates of “under-matched” students
- Impacts on “racial harmony” and White attitudes
- Impacts on students of color
- Impacts on Asian students (who are often not “targeted” but ARE often discriminated against in favor of Whites, relative to qualifications)
Factual dispute about ability

- Whether disadvantaged students have ability and can do well if given a chance (Bok & Bowen vs Bell Curve)
- The Shape of the River: Long-Term Consequences of Considering Race in College and University Admissions results from a lengthy collaboration of two former college presidents: William Bowen, president of Princeton University from 1972 to 1988 and now president of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; and Derek Bok ’54, president of Harvard University from 1971 to 1991.
- The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life (A Free Press Paperbacks Book) by Richard J. Herrnstein, Charles Murray

College Admissions Rhetoric & Discourse

- “Reverse discrimination” labels Whites as victims
- Quotas are illegal & not used, but critics of “affirmative action” paint it as a quota program (blurs distinctions)
- The icon of the “highly qualified white” – there are no mediocre or marginally qualified whites?
- The icon of the “unqualified minority” – there are no qualified minorities?
- Drawing comparison to alumni preferences
- Diversity language: types of diversity (i.e. opinions, geographic, language vs. race/ethnicity)
- Disadvantage language: is race/ethnicity per se a disadvantage? Are disadvantaged Whites losing out?

Center for Equal Opportunity web site

- http://www.ceousa.org/general.html
- The Wisconsin report seems to have been pulled from the web site—links from news stories no longer work

Opening discussion

- What issues are on people’s minds about college admissions in general and UW admissions in particular?
- What are the dimensions of concern?
  - Cost
  - Geography
  - Test scores
  - Class standing
  - Non-academic talents
  - “Legacy” – alumni parents
  - Individual disadvantage: “first generation” or income
  - Ethnic/racial diversity

Sources of data

- http://apa.wisc.edu/ Madison campus Provost’s office, Academic Planning contains a ton of relevant information
- http://www.uwsa.edu/opar/sbr/ UW System Office of Policy Analysis & Research
- http://registrar.wisc.edu/enrollment_reports_and_student_statistics.html
- http://apa.wisc.edu/diversity.html
Rising Wealth

Income distribution of the parents of freshman classes entering the 250 most selective colleges and universities.

- **Highest 25 percent** 1985: 46.1%, 2005: 42.1%
- **Middle 50 percent** 1985: 40.9%, 2005: 33.2%
- **Lowest 25 percent** 1985: 13.0%, 2005: 11.8%

Source: Alexander W. Astin and Leticia Oceguera, Higher Education Research Institute, University of California, Los Angeles

Students from the wealthiest families have a rising advantage at the most selective colleges. New York Times April 2004.

UW Madison is a high-income school

Median Family Income of WI Resident Freshmen

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Median Family Income Estimate

- All WI Families
- UW System Freshmen
- UW-Madison Freshmen

Tuition Increases: Resident & Non-Resident

Undergraduate Tuition & Fees by Residency
As a Percent of 1990 Level

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Resident Tuition & Fees as a Percentage of Non-Resident Tuition & Fees

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Chart I
Average ACT Score (or Converted SAT Score)
of Entering New Freshmen

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<td>2003</td>
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1990-2003

Non-Resident
Resident & Minnesota Compact

Race of UW by time

Proportion White declined in 1990s, cannot distinguish minorities in this plot.

Minorities only

All students of color = 15.8% (11.1% "targeted")

Whites 77% (down from 95% in the 1980s)

Minorities: Time Trends

UW Freshmen %s

Afr Amer
Latino
Nat Amer
Asian
White & Unknown
Int'l

UW Freshmen %s (Minorities Only)

All Amer
Latino
Nat Amer
Asian
Int'l

White
Plan 2008 Monitoring: Undergraduate

New First-Year Targeted Minority Undergraduates, as a percent of New First-Year Undergraduate Enrollments

Percent of UW-Madison Undergraduates

Admission rates

- In your notes:
  - What's % acceptance rate?
  - What % acceptance rate by race?
    - White
    - Black
    - Native
    - Asian
    - Hispanic
    - International
- See PDF file, report on New Freshman Applicants 2009
- Note race patterns from report in next graph
More data

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Pamela Oliver  Sociology 220

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The end