

## TOOL 1

# The Diversity Imperative: The Compelling Case

## The Issue

In 2003, the U.S. Supreme Court resolved the issue that had been the subject of contentious litigation and debate for decades: whether the educational benefits of diversity could ever justify the limited consideration of race or ethnicity when conferring educational opportunities, such as in admission and financial aid decisions. Their answer, affirmed by all nine justices of the Court only four years later, was a clear "yes."

The resulting central questions for higher education institutions are: Are diversity interests central to their ability to achieve their education goals? And, if so, how should those interests be framed and pursued as a matter of institution-specific policy?

## The Policy Context

The foundations for developing effective and sustainable diversity-related policies are principally based on social science, as well as institutional research and experience. (See "Selected Resources.") As illustrated in *Grutter* (2003), these foundations are also essential when making the case regarding the "compelling interests" that may support institutional policies when they are race or ethnicity conscious.

## THE EDUCATIONAL AND ECONOMIC RATIONALES

- Benefits of a diverse student population (including, but not limited to, racial and ethnic diversity) include promoting cross-racial understanding, breaking down racial stereotypes, and promoting livelier and more enlightening classroom discussion.
- A college student's diversity experience is associated with higher-learning outcomes such as enhanced critical thinking skills, more involvement in community service, and a greater likelihood for retention and graduation.
- Efforts to prepare students to interact with and serve diverse populations in their career field upon graduation directly implicate diversity-related policies. For example, racial and ethnic diversity within U.S. medical schools is linked to successfully preparing medical students to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population.
- Today's U.S. minority populations are tomorrow's majorities and, if our minorities continue educational attainment at the same rate, the U.S. will no longer be an economic global leader. The table below illustrates this point.

**Table 1:** Demographic Trends and Educational Attainment

Demographic	2008 Percent of Population	2050 Projected Percent of Population	2002 Estimated High School Graduation Rate*	2000 Bachelor's Degree or Higher Attainment Rate
White	66%	46%	78%	26%
Black	14%	15%	56%	14%
Hispanic	15%	30%	52%	10%

\*All national high school graduation rates are estimates as there is not a standard formula for calculation among states.

## THE CIVIC AND NATIONAL SECURITY RATIONALES

- As the United States becomes increasingly diverse, higher education institutions must prepare their students for citizenship—viewed by the U.S. Supreme Court as “pivotal to ‘sustaining our political and cultural heritage’ ... [and] in maintaining the fabric of society.”
- National security requires a diverse group of educated citizens able to defend our nation in all parts of the globe. The military cannot maintain a highly qualified and diverse officer corps if cadets and other students in colleges, ROTCs, and academies that prepare such officer candidates don’t have a diverse student body.

## “ On the Record: The Compelling Educational Benefits Associated with Student Diversity

*The “educational benefits that diversity is designed to produce ... are substantial, ... important and laudable. ... [S]tudent body diversity promotes learning outcomes, and better prepares students for an increasingly diverse workforce and society, and better prepares them as professionals. ... These benefits are not theoretical but real, as major American businesses have made clear that the skills needed in today’s increasingly global marketplace can only be developed through exposure to widely diverse people, cultures, ideas and viewpoints.”*

### JUSTICE SANDRA DAY O’CONNOR

in *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003), citing in part briefs of major corporations, including General Motors Corp. and 3M.

## SELECTED RESOURCES

### The Benefits of Diversity

1. Expert Report of Patricia Gurin in *Bollinger* litigation at [www.vpcomm.umich.edu/admissions/legal/expert/gurintoc.html](http://www.vpcomm.umich.edu/admissions/legal/expert/gurintoc.html)
2. Palmer, “A Policy Framework for Reconceptualizing the Legal Debate Concerning Affirmative Action in Higher Education” in *Diversity Challenged: Evidence on the Impact of Affirmative Action* (G. Orfield and M. Kurlaender, Eds., 2001).
3. Gurin et al., “Diversity and Higher Education: Theory and Impact on Educational Outcomes,” *72 Harvard Educational Review* 3, (2002) at <http://her.hepg.org/content/01151786u134n051/?p=17e07b44228be4e4ead0003c80d4245f6&pi=1>
4. Milem et al., “Making Diversity Work on Campus: A Research-Based Perspective,” in *Making Excellence Inclusive* (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2005) at [www.siher.stanford.edu/AntonioMilemChang\\_makingdiversitywork.pdf](http://www.siher.stanford.edu/AntonioMilemChang_makingdiversitywork.pdf)

## Key Action Steps

- 1 Assess core education goals in light of research, experience, and U.S. Supreme Court findings—ultimately determining which of the interests generally recognized specifically apply to the higher education institution.
- 2 Evaluate the connections between student diversity and the institution’s ability to achieve core education goals.
- 3 Where those connections exist, evaluate (and pursue, as appropriate) the development and implementation of policies that will promote that diversity, as one set of strategies designed to achieve success.