

# Admission: Exploring Key Strategies for Achieving Success

## The Issue

Over the course of nearly three decades, the U.S. Supreme Court has addressed issues of higher education admission designed to advance access and diversity goals in three landmark cases: *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978), *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003), and *Gratz v. Bollinger* (2003). The challenge for higher education institutions that include the consideration of race, ethnicity, or gender (in particular) in their admission policies is to ensure that they both advance core educational aims while doing so in ways that are within the proscriptions of these significant cases.

## The Policy Context

The goals and processes associated with the selection of students to attend higher education institutions vary greatly from institution to institution. Those differences notwithstanding, there are several principles that tend to characterize the work of admission officers, regardless of the institution at which they serve. Most notably, the admission process is often a complex process that reflects in each institution a “unique compromise among competing values and priorities.”<sup>1</sup> When the values and priorities include creating a class that will provide the educational benefits of diversity, the following principles should be kept in mind:

- Institutional, mission-driven foundations should inform the scope and substance of admission policies.
- Admission policies should provide for the holistic assessment of the merit of students the institution seeks to admit, with a focus on all relevant qualifications and characteristics—those related to academic preparation and potential, and those related to other student qualities that the institution values, as set forth in mission-related policies.
- All applicants who are admitted, regardless of background, must be qualified.
- Good educational and psychometric foundations should inform judgments regarding students who are deemed qualified and those who aren’t similarly evaluated.
- Admission policies should be integrated and aligned with related enrollment policies.
- The weighting of race, ethnicity, and gender (among other factors) shouldn’t fundamentally undercut the value of individualized holistic review; or create rigid or quota-like mechanisms as part of the admission process.
- Qualified, nonminority applicants who bring particular attributes associated with diversity must have the opportunity to be admitted over minority applicants with higher grades and scores.
- Admission decisions should reflect consideration of the race, ethnicity, or gender of applicants only where it has been determined that such consideration is necessary in order to achieve institutional diversity-related goals.

## Key Action Steps

- 1 Establish and refine over time a process of individualized, holistic review through which candidates are evaluated with respect to their likely ability to succeed if admitted, as well as their likely ability to contribute to the vitality of the institution (e.g., spurring more robust learning among peers, as well as better teaching, and promoting nonacademic experiences that will benefit their peers).
- 2 Meaningfully evaluate, over time, admission processes and standards based on data, ranging from objective data to information gleaned through surveys, interviews, etc.
- 3 Stay current regarding the research and institutional foundations that shape knowledge and perceptions of institutional diversity—and ensure that those foundations inform policies over time.

### SELECTED RESOURCES

1. *Admissions and Diversity After Michigan: The Next Generation of Legal and Policy Issues* (The College Board, 2006) at [www.collegeboard.com/accessanddiversity](http://www.collegeboard.com/accessanddiversity) (This manual significantly expands upon the points addressed in this tool.)
2. *Navigating a Complex Legal Landscape to Foster Greater Faculty and Student Diversity in Higher Education* (American Association for the Advancement of Science, October 2009) [in press].
2. Rigol, *Admissions Decision-Making Models: How U.S. Institutions of Higher Education Select Undergraduate Students* (The College Board, 2003).
4. Perfetto et al., *Toward a Taxonomy of the Admissions Decision-Making Process* (The College Board, 1999).
5. Blackburn, *Assessment and Evaluation in Admission* (The College Board, 1990).

### CITATIONS

1. Perfetto et al., *Toward a Taxonomy of the Admissions Decision-Making Process* (The College Board, 1999); see also *Best Practices in Admissions Decisions* (The College Board, 2002).