



Background factors should be considered in college admissions

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“Sixteen prestigious U.S. universities argued in a court filing that any prohibition on considering race in admissions decisions would be an ‘extraordinary intrusion’ by the federal government, as the schools expressed support for Harvard University in a closely watched affirmative-action lawsuit,” Melissa Korn noted in Monday’s Wall Street Journal.

Affirmative action – pretty much since it was introduced by President John Kennedy in 1962 – has been one of the more contentious strategies employed in the still-ongoing struggle to make higher education accessible to populations traditionally and historically denied the opportunities afforded their more affluent and less oppressed peers.

The cold, hard reality is that grade-point averages and standardized test scores are not objective, impartial and unbiased measures of ability and/or potential; they can only be meaningfully interpreted within the context of a person’s race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and geocultural origins. By themselves, GPAs and test scores are very poor predictors of what individual students can achieve when provided with the appropriate environmental support.

As such, I would argue it is morally and ethically wrong not to weigh those background factors heavily in the college admissions process. Students who have been exposed to systematic discrimination and racism, as well as those who were raised in abject poverty, face tremendous challenges that students who have not been subject to those conditions cannot legitimately fathom. But they can still be successful and I believe they should be given a chance.

It is the height of hypocrisy when those in power claim they have no responsibility to help those they have victimized for centuries. The creators of the corrupt and jaundiced system that still exists have an innate responsibility to remove the barriers purposefully put in place in a misguided and evil attempt to preserve their preeminent place on the social and economic hierarchy.

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