

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION MYTHS

University of Michigan

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MYTH #1

Race is no longer a significant factor in American life.

REALITY 101

After all this time, we want to believe that America's long history of problematic race relations is resolved. But today, as minority communities continue to grow in the United States, we remain a nation divided in far too many ways. Our hometowns and neighborhoods tell the story: 92 per cent of U-M's incoming white students grew up in racially separate communities, as did 52 percent of our African American students. The overwhelming majority of our entering freshmen come from all-black or all white high schools.

TAGLINE

This is reality. Admissions at Michigan is a fair, comprehensive assessment of every applicant's ability to succeed and potential to contribute.

MYTH #2

Everyone is admitted to U-M in some rank order of merit except under-represented minorities, who get an unfair advantage because of their race.

REALITY 102

Michigan receives about 20,000 applications for 5,000 available spaces every year. And most of those applicants have solid grades and test scores. So how do we make the tough decisions? We look at each applicant's overall achievements and potential, including things like leadership, service and recognized talent in art, music or athletics. And we strive for geographic, ethnic and racial, socio-economic and gender diversity within our student community. That's why admission to Michigan goes beyond a simple formula. It's a multi-factor process that helps us choose students who will make the greatest contributions to our community as they succeed within it.

TAGLINE

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MYTH #3

"Diversity" may be a good idea, but it's like an elective. It's not required for a good education.

REALITY 103

You go to college to learn things you don't already know, to travel beyond personal experience in your search for knowledge and insight. You learn more in environments where assumptions are examined from different points of view, with people who have life experiences unlike your own, people who look at the world differently. This is backed up by recent national research based at Michigan (www.umich.edu/~urel/admissions/legal/expert/gurintoc.html), Stanford (www.stanford.edu/Ehakuta/RaceInHigherEducation.html), and Harvard (www.law.harvard.edu/groups/civilrights/publications/lawsurvey.htm). The most complete, enlightening education is available in diverse environments.

TAGLINE

This is reality. Diversity is not an elective.

MYTH #4

The test score gap is just too wide between the underrepresented minority students and everyone else. It's not fair to anyone when they just cannot keep up.

REALITY 104

Everyone admitted to the University of Michigan is capable of succeeding at Michigan. In fact, recent research demonstrates that underrepresented minority students with relatively lower GPAs and test scores succeed at a higher rate at top schools like Michigan, than at second- and third-tier institutions. Incoming students from small rural schools may have to work hard, along with their peers from under-resourced inner-city schools, to compensate for a math course that wasn't available back home, or a 12th grade teacher who wasn't quite up to snuff. But each and every one of our students is capable of doing the work. Almost as importantly, each student can be expected to make a substantial contribution to the education of her/his classmates in class discussions and activities inside and outside the classroom.

TAGLINE

This is reality. Every Michigan student is qualified to be here and prepared to succeed.

MYTH #5

The solution is already out there in Texas, Florida and California. The end of affirmative action will not resegregate American campuses.

REALITY 105

Although we keep hearing that an end to affirmative action will not lead to re-segregation in higher education, this is precisely what will occur, as it has in California, where the enrollment of minority students at the flagship institutions has dropped dramatically under Proposition 209.

Elsewhere, programs to guarantee admission to the top ten or twenty percent of high school classes create more problems than they solve. They depend on segregated high schools. They wrongly assume that all high schools are the same and therefore penalize students at demanding secondary schools and those students who take the most challenging courses. They run the risk of admitting students who aren't prepared to do the work. This quick fix doesn't work at all for graduate and professional schools.

TAGLINE

This is reality. Those kinds of initiatives will lead inexorably to the tragic resegregation of American higher education. There is not simple, magic solution to these highly complex questions.