

# Colleges seek diversity options as case reaches Supreme Court

By Fred Tasker  
KRT CAMPUS

How do college admissions officers decide who gets in and who doesn't, especially when the goal is student diversity?

It's a crucial issue as America becomes increasingly diverse. In fact, by 2050, the United States could be a society in which no single race or ethnic group will make up more than 50 percent of the population, the U.S. Census Bureau says.

"Every selective university wants to have a diverse student body — economically, geographically, racially," says Rachel Toor, who spent two years as an admissions officer at Duke University and wrote the book "Admissions Confidential" (St. Martin's Press).

With Tuesday's U.S. Supreme Court hearing putting in jeopardy the University of Michigan's affirmative-action plan of race-based preferences, U.S. universities are turning to other ways to encourage diversity.

The system for which the

University of Michigan is being sued is an affirmative-action plan in which students are rated on a 150-point scale, earning 20 of those points for being black, Hispanic or another underrepresented racial/ethnic minority. They also can earn up to 110 points for academic achievement plus points for being socioeconomically disadvantaged, for being a "legacy" (child of an alum) and other factors. A score of about 130 is often enough to get in.

In a lawsuit on behalf of three non-Hispanic white applicants, lawyers for the Center for Individual Rights call the point system "a race-based double standard in admissions."

They say the university admitted all the minority applicants with high school grades similar to the three rejected students (3.3 to 3.8 GPA), but only 32 percent of the non-minority students with such scores.

Michigan says that, since it received 13,500 applications in 1997 and had only 3,958 freshman slots, it had to reject many qualified applicants.

"Grades, test scores and other academic indicators are important, but not the only relevant factors," the university says in its brief to the Supreme Court.

Michigan says that it gave the extra points for race to achieve diversity in its student body, since only 6 percent of the minority applicants had the usually required B average and 1200 SAT score.

In place for 20 years, University of Michigan's affirmative-action program had achieved gains in diversity, but not total parity. In 2002, Michigan's freshman class was 75 percent non-Hispanic white, 8 percent black and 5 percent Hispanic. The state's college-age population in 2000 was 76 percent non-Hispanic white, 15 percent black and 4 percent Hispanic.

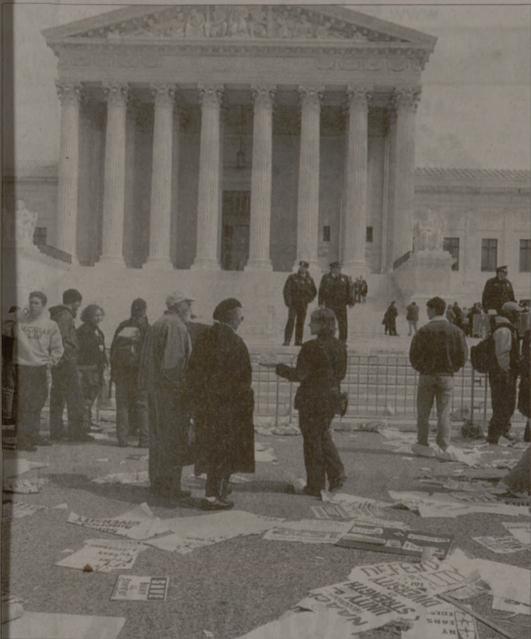
Percentage admissions plans are favored by the Justice Department. In their brief to the Supreme Court opposing Michigan's affirmative-action plan, the Justice Department lawyers accept the value of a racially diverse student body. But they say such diversity can be achieved by such "race-neutral" policies as the three states' "percentage plans."

Texas universities were segregated by the state's constitution until 1954. The affirmative-action plan it later instituted was overturned in 1996 by the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, with the U.S. Supreme Court refusing to hear appeals.

No longer able to consider race, the state turned to admitting the top 10 percent of each Texas public high school's graduates to any of the state's 35 universities, regardless of test scores.

Result: Between 1996, the year before the plan began, and 2001, blacks went from 12.5 percent to 12.8 percent of Texas university students; Hispanics went from 19.6 percent to 21.3 percent.

Problem: Blacks made up 13 percent, and Hispanics made up 39 percent of Texas' college-age population, according to the 2000 U.S. Census. So while the percentage plan did not reduce diversity, as some had feared, it didn't produce anything near parity for Texas' Hispanics.



Posters lay on the sidewalk Tuesday in front of the U.S. Supreme Court after a demonstration as arguments were heard in two cases involving University of Michigan's affirmative action admissions policies.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Nun says protest at missile is worth 30 years in prison

DENVER (AP) — A Roman Catholic nun representing herself against charges she and two other sisters allegedly defaced a missile silo tearfully told jurors on Tuesday that the peace protest was worthwhile, even if the nuns are jailed.

Sisters Ardeth Platte, 66, Jackie Hudson, 68 and Carol Gilbert, 55, are accused of breaking into a Minuteman III missile silo site on Colorado's north-eastern plains Oct. 6, swinging hammers at it and painting a cross in their own blood on the structure.

All three have been charged with interfering with the nation's defense and causing property damage of more than \$1,000 — a crime could put them behind bars for 30 years if they are convicted. Platte said serving a sentence would be worth it if people think more about the weapons.

"If we have to spend the rest of our lives in prison we will," she said, fighting tears. "We have friends who are in the war zone. We must do more for peace."

Hudson's attorney, Walter Gerash, said the nuns may be guilty of trespassing, but never jeopardized national security.

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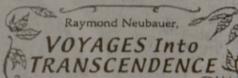


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