

Allegations of bias against Asian Americans are part of the raging debate in the US. Whites as well as people of colour await the outcome of a petition filed by Students for Fair Admissions, accusing Harvard University of racial balancing instead of a pro-merit race-neutral policy in admissions

# Racial bias in US admissions

## Attempt to limit Asian Americans in universities



PROF SHIEN BIAU WOO

Today, the average percentage of Jewish students is 25 per cent on Ivy League campuses, with a 6-million population. Compare! There are about 20 million AsAms, while Harvard is limiting AsAms on campus to about 20 per cent. There is no reasoning...

Harvard's "whole person" admissions policy, as revealed by the SFFA (Students for Fair Admissions) lawsuit, is a "whole race" admission policy. It discriminates against Asian American (AsAm) youth in order to benefit youth from all other races, especially the white race. How America's top educational institution can operate such a hidden discriminatory admissions policy against Asian students who want to study in that institution is beyond imagination. Harvard has become complacent. An international outcry of its discriminatory omission policy may wake it up.

Harvard's emphasis on diversity is a charade. Here is the proof: 80-20 National Asian American Political Action Committee has proposed to give blacks and Hispanics as many scholastic assessment test (SAT) points as necessary to achieve a critical mass for each.

Once the diversity purpose is achieved, it shouldn't be necessary to penalise AsAms. Will Harvard go for it? Of course not. Because Harvard's real purpose is to limit the number of AsAm students while taking in more white students. Harvard is just applying the same fix on us as it did against the Jewish students about 100 years ago.

How did the Jewish community overcome this prejudice? Apply the political clout that comes with united action. Today the average percentage of Jewish students is 25 per cent on Ivy campuses, with a 6-million population. Compare. There are about 20 million AsAms, while Harvard is limiting AsAms on campus to about 20 per cent. There is no reasoning or logic or noble intentions or educational purpose involved; just raw prejudice and political clout.

There is enough proof for the ugly discrimination against AsAm youngsters by elite colleges, including a number of new discoveries. These colleges are using the nobility of diversity as a cover to give an illegal advantage to white applicants over AsAms, thereby imposing an illegal quota on the number of AsAm students admitted.

The desire for diversity and the intent of the Affirmative Action Programme cause the higher acceptance rate of Hispanic and Black applicants with comparable academic achievements, which most AsAms understand and embrace. However, why are AsAms given a lower acceptance rate than white peers?

For the sake of diversity, we do embrace the idea of granting extra points to the ACT (originally American College Testing) SAT scores of blacks and Hispanics — we would add even more, if needed. However, why are 140 SAT points taken away from AsAm applicants? This is to give the white applicants an advantage of 140 SAT points over the historically disadvantaged AsAms by using the nobility of diversity as a cover. This is the reverse of affirmative action. This is a gross abuse of affirmative action. This is outrageous discrimination.

We estimate that the AsAm admissions into Ivy League colleges would be about 25 per cent, not 18 per cent, if AsAms were not deceitfully forced to yield 140 points to whites.

**Cowardly discrimination against the weak and disorganised:** Some may say AsAms are only 6 per cent of the national population, 16 +/- 3 per cent is already too many. Really? Are they advocating a quota, which the Supreme Court ruled as illegal? America's ideal is meritocracy. (See graph)

It is a testament to America's decency that discrimination against the Jews has stopped. Nevertheless, the Ivies' discrimination against

### THE SUPERIOR IVY LEAGUE COLLEGES HAVE COMMITTED DISCRIMINATION AGAINST ASAM STUDENTS

**JEWISH AMERICANS COMPRISE ONLY 2 PER CENT OF THE U.S. POPULATION. LOOK AT THE PERCENTAGE OF THEIR YOUNGSTERS IN THE IVIES, AS REPORTED BY THE JERUSALEM POST IN 2015.**

| YALE   | HARVARD              | CORNELL               | COLUMBIA             |
|--|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 27%  | 21%                  | 21%                   | 35%                  |
| (1,500 Jewish undergrads out of 5,477 total) | (1,675 out of 6,694) | (3,000 out of 14,315) | (3,000 out of 8,613) |

Further internet research reveals the following:

Penn: 25% | Princeton, Dartmouth and Brown: 13% to 20%



'SFFA' LAWSUIT CITES DATA CULLED FROM 1,60,000 STUDENT RECORDS TO ARGUE THAT HARVARD RATES ASIAN-AMERICAN APPLICANTS BELOW PAR ON TRAITS LIKE 'POSITIVE PERSONALITY', 'LIKEABILITY', 'COURAGE', 'KINDNESS' AND BEING 'WIDELY RESPECTED'.

DOCUMENTS WITH THE FEDERAL COURT IN BOSTON SHOW THAT HARVARD PROBED ITS OWN ADMISSION POLICIES IN 2013 AND FOUND A BIAS AGAINST ASIAN-AMERICAN APPLICANTS, WHO HAD BETTER TEST SCORES BUT LOW PERSONAL RATINGS.

THE SUPREME COURT IN THE YEAR 2016 RULED THAT RACE COULD BE USED AS ONE OF MANY FACTORS IN ADMISSIONS. HARVARD CITES THIS IN THE CONTEXT OF ITS POLICY OF CELEBRATING DIVERSITY ON THE CAMPUS.

the weak and unorganised AsAms is cowardly.

Harvard's 'Holistic Evaluation' is a charade. The White House Commission on Presidential Scholars tells annually that AsAms are not nerdy: Harvard has never defined its "holistic evaluation". It fought tooth and nail to keep its admissions records secret. What is Harvard afraid of? How about practising the transparency that Harvard preaches to its students and the rest of the nation so frequently?

Fortunately, another group also performs a holistic evaluation of high school graduates annually. The esteemed 'White House Commission on Presidential Scholars' evaluates all high school graduates "on academic achievement, personal characteristics, leadership, service, and other extracurricular activities, and an analysis of their essays".

The Presidential Scholars Award Programme, where clearly defined holistic evaluation is used, has named AsAms to 28 per cent of their finalists spots averaged over the last 15 years. Over that same period, AsAms have made up only 18 per cent of Harvard's admissions.

Three Supreme Court Justices also saw the bias: Supreme Court Justices J. Alito, John Roberts and Clarence Thomas stated in their dissent, issued on June 23, 2016: "...discriminates against Asian American students... including racial discrimination that undeniably harms Asian Americans... the court's willingness to allow this discrimination against individuals of Asian descent is particularly troubling, in light of the long history of discrimination against Asian Americans, especially in education... In particular, the Fifth Circuit's wilful blindness to Asian-American students is absolutely shameful."

Ivy League colleges are superior in numerous ways. However, they have committed discrimination against AsAm students, and have practised hypocrisy and deceitfulness with their decision to favour white students over their AsAm peers. It is a very short-sighted policy, possibly induced by racism and self-conceit. History will not be kind to the presidents of these colleges, who participated in this apparent cabal.

(The author, a former Democrat, is president, 80-20 Educational Foundation, which champions the cause of Asian Americans)

## WHAT HARVARD SAYS



Mr Edward Blum, president of Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA) and SFFA's characterisation of the incomplete work by Harvard's Office of Institutional Research is completely without merit. As they know, this work was explicitly understood to be preliminary and incomplete, and it was done with limited admissions data. The comprehensive work done by economist David Card — who had access to full admissions database — shows no evidence of discrimination.

"Thorough and comprehensive analysis of the data and evidence makes clear that Harvard College does not discriminate against applicants from any group, including Asian-Americans, whose rate of admission has grown 29 per cent over the last decade. Mr Blum and his organisation's incomplete and misleading data analysis paint a dangerously inaccurate picture of Harvard College's whole-person admissions process by omitting critical data and information factors, such as personal essays and teacher recommendations, that directly counter his arguments.

"Harvard will continue to vigorously defend our right, and that of other colleges and universities nationwide, to seek the educational benefits that come from a class that is diverse on multiple dimensions, from its capacity for academic excellence to its ability to help create a campus community that gives every student the opportunity to learn from peers with a wide variety of academic interests, perspectives, and talents."

## Race neutrality helps students grow



PROF P. SOMASUNDARAN

There is a lot of buzz here in the US about the fate of the petition filed by students against Harvard's racial balancing in admissions. But experience bears out the fact that higher education is better served if there is no racial, cultural and ethnic diversity on the campus.

I have lived and worked in different universities in the US and am indebted to the superb racial mix of students and faculty for my better education about the world. Complaints about discrimination are commonplace while an institution tries to ensure diversity.

Sometimes an alleged bias, not favouring merit, is possible given a university's compulsions to raise funds for expansion and development. But the larger issue at stake in Harvard vs Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA) is whether a university has to be race neutral in student admissions or adopt a policy of racial balancing.

Asian Americans can't feign ignorance of home truths. For instance, many states in India follow the communal reservations policy as part of affirmative action and social engineering. So for us to argue against racial balancing in the US is too far-fetched.

There is some truth in the charge that Asian Americans score less on personal rating because for most of us the foreign language is a barrier to full

What is required is a delicate balancing act: fairness to academically high scoring students balanced against fairness to economically and socially handicapped minority students, some of whom may not have scored as high as others

expression. In other words, Asians' ratings on soft skills may be undermined by a language deficit.

I have personally noticed that some Asian students are hesitant to speak up even six months after arriving in the US, even though they often have something worthwhile and valid to contribute to a given discussion. This of course is less of an issue for Asian Americans born or raised in this country.

In addition to that, there may also be a subtler cultural component at work here. In many Asian American families, children learn that one needs to be very respectful and not be seen as "pushy" or "self-aggrandising" when speaking to one's elders and people in authority. It is just good manners to them. This behaviour is no measure of how these students will perform in their careers when they themselves are in positions of authority.

I really think universities are unaware of how really unimportant in the long run these transient, so called bad traits, are.

Perhaps it is not out of place for the Asian communities to educate the admissions officers.

Diversity policy has been in effect at Harvard and all the other Ivy League colleges for many years. Many communities had to fight to get to this state. I truly believe, putting aside issues of fairness, that it is beneficial to all students to be exposed to fellow students from all ethnic backgrounds, be they Black, Hispanic, European or Asian. Travel, they say, is prejudicial to narrow mindedness and bigotry. Education, in the company of students of diverse backgrounds, would surely achieve the same.

I can state with absolute certainty that my student days at the University of California at Berkeley were truly enriched by interaction with students from all over the world.

What is required is a delicate balancing act: fairness to academically high scoring students balanced against fairness to economically and socially handicapped minority students, some of whom may not have scored as high as others academically, but could potentially do so, or do even better, when given the more level-playing

**MANY STATES IN INDIA FOLLOW THE RESERVATIONS POLICY AS PART OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND SOCIAL ENGINEERING. SO FOR US TO ARGUE AGAINST RACIAL BALANCING IN THE U.S. IS FAR-FETCHED**

fields at universities.

One way to tackle this conundrum might be by having more transparency and wider and wiser input into the decision-making process. Transparency is at a premium in most private colleges, including my school. What we often have instead is translucence, which restricts the view from the other side. This is the bane of campuses everywhere.

Let us acknowledge for the sake of argument that all universities sometimes need to give consideration to legacy students, employee's children, and athletes. May be, very occasionally, even to the child of a big donor who helped build a facility that now all can enjoy (yes, I know I am skating on thin ice here).

Still, if the system is not grossly abused, it still leaves the majority of the seats for the rest of us. Universities can set up a formula, this time after consultation with students, alumni, educators, psychologists and even industry leaders, which does not smack of favouritism, nepotism and racism.

It is when there is no transparency and when universities, which are after all perceived as gatekeepers to a student's successful future, develop what seems like arbitrary, sneaky, so-called soft criterion for admission, that students become suspicious and unhappy. That is when they sue.

It is in a nation's best interests to properly develop the minds of its brightest and best so they may be able to tackle the problems of the future.

What we lack is a good definition of those two terms and a way to identify and train the ones that best fit the description. It might be best if universities solved this problem themselves, rather than leave it to a judge in a courtroom to do so.

(The author teaches at Columbia University)

