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SHOULD COLLEGES USE AFFIRMATIVE ACTION?

Word Generation - Unit 2.02

Focus Words

affirmative | discrimination | aspect | retain | relevant



WEEKLY PASSAGE

College admissions can be very competitive. Elite colleges admit only half or a quarter of the students who apply. Because the process is tough, admissions decisions can be controversial.

Some colleges look at students' races during admissions. Suppose an African-American student and a white student are similar. They have about the same grades and test scores. The African-American student may be more likely to be accepted. This is called "**Affirmative** Action." Colleges may use this to increase the number of minorities on campus. The idea is that racial diversity helps college students learn to work with people from different backgrounds.

Affirmative Action is designed to make up for past **discrimination**. African-Americans and Latinos were kept out of college in past generations.

Students from these groups today are less likely to have family members who went to college. They

may have less inside knowledge about college preparation.

Without Affirmative Action, fewer minority students will attend elite colleges. At UC Berkeley, the number of African-Americans admitted dropped from 562 to 191 after the school stopped using race as one **aspect** of admissions. Looking at this experience, people argue that race should be **retained** as a factor in admissions.

Others say Affirmative Action is not fair because it can discriminate against white students. These people believe schools should only look at grades and test scores. They think that the color of a student's skin is not **relevant**. Is it important for colleges to have racial diversity? Should they use Affirmative Action?

Should colleges use affirmative action?

FOCUS WORDS OF THE WEEK

affirmative : (adjective) positive

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

discrimination : (noun) prejudice toward a particular group of people

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

aspect : (noun) a part of something; a characteristic

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

retain : (verb) to keep; to hold in place

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

relevant : (adjective) connected

FORMS:

EXAMPLES OF USE:

NOTES:

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PROBLEM OF THE WEEK

Affirmative action is meant to give groups that have faced **discrimination** a better chance to succeed in American society. College attendance is **relevant** to success because college graduates usually make more money. Therefore, affirmative action programs in college might be a good way to help these groups. U.S. courts have decided that colleges can **retain** some, but not all, affirmative action programs.


In 2008, the U.S. Census Bureau found the following:

- ▶ 40% of white 18-24 year-olds were enrolled in college.
- ▶ 32% of African-American 18-24 year-olds were enrolled in college.
- ▶ 26% of Hispanic 18-24 year-olds were enrolled in college.

Option 1: Which of the following shows the fraction of Hispanic 18 – 24 year-olds enrolled in college in 2008?

- A) $\frac{1}{3}$
- B) $\frac{8}{25}$
- C) $\frac{13}{50}$
- D) $\frac{16}{25}$

Option 2: The year is 2008. Two 18-24 year-olds are chosen at random. One person is African-American, and one is white. How much more likely is the white person to be in college than the African-American person? Express as a percentage.

 **Discussion Question:** In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson described the need for **affirmative** action this way:

“You do not take a man who for years has been hobbled by chains, liberate him, bring him to the starting line of a race, saying, ‘you are free to compete with all the others,’ and still justly believe you have been completely fair . . . We seek not just freedom but opportunity—not just legal equity but human ability—not just equality as a right and a theory, but equality as a fact and as a result.”

Women and non-whites have faced prejudice and **discrimination** in America. Therefore, when the question of fairness arises, race and gender are seen as **relevant aspects** of the people involved. Some people think that America has become less prejudiced. As a result, they say, today’s America should not **retain** affirmative action. But have we achieved “equality as a fact and as a result”? Or did President Johnson chose the wrong goal?

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THINKING SCIENTIFICALLY

The students in Ms. Kahn’s class are discussing the pros and cons of **Affirmative** Action.

“I don’t think race should be **relevant** in college admissions. If I apply to college, I want to get in because of my work and grades, not because of my skin color,” says Amir.

“It’s not as simple as that, Amir,” says Kayla, “Admissions offices examine many **aspects** of a student’s application, including race—but not only race—to decide to admit one student over another.”

“Yeah, but aren’t we supposed to be past all that?” asks Amir, “Be ‘color-blind’ and all?”

“I think that’s just a slogan. I think there is still **discrimination** in the U.S. today,” Kayla responded. “Think about it. Do you really think that women and people of color get treated the same as white men?”

“My mom was laid off from work a few months ago,” Taylor shared. “She said that more men were **retained** at her office and that some even got raises. Mom thinks that it’s not a fair situation.”

Ms. Kahn says, “We’ll need data to support any claims we make, one way or the other. I know of a recent study of U.S. Census data that we can take a look at. I just read about it in the newspaper.”

- ➔ Ms. Kahn shared a sample of the data from the National Partnership for Women and Families with her students, which used U.S. Census Bureau data to compare average salaries for women and men working full-time jobs in the top fifty metropolitan areas across America.

City	Average salary for men	Average salary for women
Chicago	\$52,222	\$41,610
Los Angeles	\$44,360	\$40,695
New Orleans	\$45,970	\$34,862
New York	\$55,071	\$46,642
San Francisco	\$62,269	\$52,301
Seattle	\$60,881	\$44,535

- What are some conclusions that you can draw from this information? How does the average salary vary by city? Is the gap larger in some cities? What is the overall trend when comparing the average salary for men and women across this selection of cities?

- How would you investigate this topic further? What else would you want to know?

When John F. Kennedy signed the Equal Pay Act in 1963, women were paid 59 cents for every dollar men were paid. 50 years later, in 2013, women are paid 77 cents for every dollar that men are paid. Would you consider that a big change, or a small change? Do you think it is fair?

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DEBATING THE ISSUE

Get ready...

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A Affirmative Action should be legal in college admissions because it is the only way to give minorities a fair chance.

B Affirmative Action helps everyone benefit from diversity on college campuses.

C Affirmative Action should not be legal because it discriminates against white students.

D Affirmative Action should not be legal because it leads colleges to judge students by their skin color, not by their abilities.

E _____

Get set...

Be ready to provide evidence to back up your position during your class discussion or debate. Jot down a few quick notes:

GO!

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these.

I believe that...

I agree with you, but...

You make a good point, but have you considered...

Can you show me evidence in the text that...

