

Advancing Diversity/Achieving Excellence

The institutions of the CIC have long been dedicated to the goals of diversity and excellence in higher education. It is our firm belief that the quality of our teaching and research is linked to our capacity to engage the forces that are reshaping our society and our sensibilities about a common culture. At a time when affirmative action is increasingly called into question, the CIC universities reaffirm our commitment to affirmative action as essential to achieving the mission of American higher education.

In recent decades, our nation has been transformed by demographic, economic and social changes. American institutions of higher education therefore face the challenge of preparing students to live and work in an increasingly diverse society in which cultural knowledge and understanding are more important than ever before. To meet this challenge, the universities of the CIC must educate students from all segments of society and must provide those students with a meaningful exposure to cultures other than their own.

Without affirmative action, our universities could not achieve this goal. We live in a society that has been shaped by generations of racial and gender discrimination. African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, and Native Americans have suffered disproportionately from poverty, crime, unemployment, and inferior primary and secondary education, while women of all ethnic backgrounds have been excluded from important areas of education and employment. As a consequence of this history, the CIC universities, without affirmative action, would enroll few minority students, and women students too often would be absent from important areas of study.

More importantly, the CIC universities will educate the next generation of leaders of government, business, law, medicine, the arts, science and education. The significant underrepresentation of minorities and women in our universities, or in particular fields within our universities, would disproportionately deny such individuals the opportunity to fulfill their potential, exacerbate the continuing effects of past racial and gender discrimination, and deprive future generations the contributions these individuals would make as successful role models to others.

In the past quarter-century, the CIC universities have made important strides toward enhancing the full participation of historically underrepresented groups and women by putting in place a broad range of affirmative action programs and activities. We have cast our nets widely to expand competition, and we have undertaken positive steps to identify and recruit qualified applicants from diverse backgrounds, to retain them once they have joined the university community, and to prepare them for future opportunities. These actions have resulted in a higher-quality student body and an enhanced educational experience for all students.

Critics of affirmative action in American higher education have focused in particular on two areas of concern: student admissions and financial aid. We should be candid about what we do and what we mean by affirmative action in these areas. Affirmative action as we practice it is not to be confused with "reverse discrimination." The affirmative action goals of the CIC universities

can be and are being achieved without the use of quotas or other methods that would treat any individual unfairly.

Student admissions decisions at CIC universities, as well as recruitment efforts and many other programs within each institution, are based on a range of factors, including academic record; standardized test scores; character (as reflected in past activities and letters of recommendation); creativity; athletic, artistic, musical and other special talents; economic background; relationship to alumni; gender; geographical origin; and racial or ethnic background. Our goal is to admit and enroll, from among the many applicants who are capable of meeting the academic standards of the institution successfully, a student body that embodies a rich mixture of skills, interests, talents and backgrounds.

Financial aid at CIC universities is provided in the form of grants, loans, and fellowships to enable students to afford their education, to help them complete their education within a reasonable time, and to attract to each institution a talented and diverse student body. Financial aid programs may target artistic or musical talent, athletic ability, academic achievement, particular areas of academic interest, and a host of other factors, including geographic, economic, gender, racial and ethnic diversity.

We acknowledge that any use of race, gender or ethnic background to differentiate among individuals can be controversial, particularly in light of our national history. Nonetheless, we reaffirm our conclusion that the careful consideration of such factors to expand educational opportunities and enrich the educational experiences of all our students is essential to our mission. What our students learn from their experiences in our universities -- and how that learning enriches the quality and vitality of their future lives and their capacities as citizens -- will in the long run help shape the spirit and strength of our democratic society.