



Community Submission: *Alleged racial 'mismatch' not a reality*

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We, the undersigned faculty, strongly support “A Day Without a Student of Color: Action and Rally.” This action was prompted by an article and opinion column published on Oct. 23 in the Daily Bruin about the legality of our freshmen admissions process.

The pieces are both misleading and irresponsible. They are misleading because they miss the forest for the trees when it comes to the statistical and other evidence about the inner workings of UCLA’s admissions process; they are irresponsible because they recklessly cast doubt on whether a large portion of the black and Latino students currently enrolled at UCLA really deserve to be here.

The core charge in the pieces is an old one that should have been put to rest long ago. Both claim that UCLA’s “holistic review” process may violate California Proposition 209’s ban on the use of racial preferences because a disproportionate number of underrepresented minority applicants are referred to “supplemental review” (a follow-up to the basic holistic review process that involves the consideration of additional information about grades, talents and challenges) and that these students are more likely to be admitted than are other students with similar holistic scores.

The pieces casually dismiss the reasonable explanation provided by UCLA admissions officials that any supplemental review outcomes are more likely due to the unique challenges faced by these applicants (and to the special talents they bring to the table) than to their race per se. One of the pieces, the opinion column, even characterizes supplemental review as merely a “smokescreen” for the use of racial preferences.

But an extensive, independent analysis of UCLA’s holistic review process concluded that it works as intended by our faculty, which approved its adoption starting with the fall 2007 freshman class. More importantly vis-à-vis the pieces’ claims, the report found no signs of race-based reader bias in the awarding of applicant holistic scores.

We should also note that the report’s basic findings mirror those from a 2005 study that validated UC Berkeley’s holistic admissions process, the process on which UCLA’s is modeled. Indeed, confidence in holistic review has grown such that campuses throughout the University of California system have adopted it in recent years as the fairest and most effective way of identifying diverse and excellent freshman classes, given the constraints imposed by Proposition 209.

The reality is that race has not been used as a factor in UCLA’s admissions since 1997. However, this fact evidently hasn’t gotten in the way of those who seem singularly focused on further reducing the number of underrepresented minority students on this campus – a number that has fallen rather dramatically in the aftermath of Proposition 209’s implementation in 1998.

It’s important to consider that the pieces’ call for (another) review of UCLA’s holistic review process is fueled by the writings of Richard Sander, a UCLA law professor who in recent years has labored to argue that a “mismatch” exists between the skills of underrepresented minority students at elite institutions like UCLA and the skills required to excel at these universities.

Unfortunately for Professor Sander’s thesis (and a growing literature exposes other problems with his thesis), underrepresented minority students do extremely well at UCLA, graduating at rates exceeding those of underrepresented minorities at other comparable institutions and not considerably lower than those of other UCLA students. And these latter small differences, the literature suggests, are probably due more to finances than to ability. The idea of “mismatch” becomes even more ludicrous within the UCLA context when we consider the stellar GPAs and other academic achievements presented by the underrepresented minority students admitted to our campus through holistic review.

In the final analysis, by ignoring what the evidence shows is the bigger picture about holistic review, the Daily Bruin article and opinion column effectively pander to a political agenda masquerading as scientific research. In the process, the newspaper has impugned the qualifications of meritorious students on this campus and owes these students an apology.

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