



Admissions Policy Guidance for the George Washington University November 2023

This document provides guidelines for admissions officers following the June 29, 2023 Supreme Court decision invalidating the use of race in the college admissions process. The purpose of this guidance is to underscore the university's commitment toward a diverse and inclusive student body in a way consistent with federal law, as articulated by the Supreme Court

I. University Values and Principles

The George Washington University remains deeply committed to diversity and inclusion, and recognizes the importance of maintaining a diverse student body, faculty, and staff that reflect the richness of our nation and the global society. University leadership encourages the entire University community to embrace this commitment and work to advance our shared objective of creating and maintaining a more diverse, equitable, and engaged community. Our admissions policy and practices must align with our values and principles, and with the evolving regulatory landscape.

II. Summary of the Supreme Court Decision and Implications for University Admissions

The June 29, 2023 Supreme Court decision involving Harvard University and the University of North Carolina (UNC) found that the use of race in their admissions policies violated both Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (prohibits organizations who receive federal assistance from discriminating on the basis of race) and the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment (prohibits racial discrimination by governmental entities). The Court found that while the pursuit of diversity was laudable, there was no “compelling interest” to justify the use of race in undergraduate college admissions, and that the admissions programs at Harvard and UNC lacked sufficiently focused and measurable objectives warranting the use of race.

As a result of the Supreme Court's decision, colleges and universities pursuing a diverse student body may no longer use race as a factor in admissions decisions. The Court did, however, provide guidance on the role race might play in admissions decisions.

The Court's specific language, which may be helpful to admissions officials, includes:

“Nothing in this opinion should be construed as prohibiting universities from considering an applicant's discussion of how race affected his or her life, be it through discrimination, inspiration, or otherwise ... [But a] benefit to a student who overcame racial discrimination, for example, must be tied to that student's courage and determination. Or a benefit to a student whose heritage or culture motivated him or her to assume a leadership role or attain a particular goal must be tied to that student's unique ability to contribute to the university. In other words, the student must be treated based on his or her experiences as an individual—not on the basis of race.”

The Court cautioned, however, that

“Universities may not simply establish through application essays or other means the regime we hold unlawful today. ‘[W]hat cannot be done directly cannot be done indirectly ... and the prohibition against racial discrimination is “levelled at the thing, not the name.””

III. Department of Education Guidance

The U. S. Department of Education (DOE) issued guidance in September 2023 entitled, “Strategies for Increasing Diversity and Opportunity in Higher Education.”¹ The DOE urged colleges and universities to maintain their “commitment to equal opportunity and student body diversity.” The DOE guidance offered, among other things, four areas for campus communities to focus on:

- **Recruitment:** Increase applications from underserved students by instituting or expanding targeted recruitment, outreach, and pathways programs.
- **Admissions:** Improve admissions practices to better reflect individual potential, such as by using holistic review; giving more consideration to adversity a student had to overcome, resiliency, and assets a student brings to their campus community; reconsidering practices that may negatively impact diversity; and considering alternative admissions programs such as direct admissions.
- **Financial Aid:** Increase affordability by investing in need-based financial aid programs and effective and transparent administration of those programs.
- **Completion and Climate:** Encourage students to enroll and support completion through promising strategies, including comprehensive student-support services and campus-climate initiatives.

IV. Provost Office Operational Guidance for GW Admissions Officials

The following operational guidance for admissions officials takes into consideration the Supreme Court decision and the DOE guidance as well as the analysis and recommendations of the Admissions Policy Task Force. This operational guidance is provided to ensure that GW’s admissions processes continue to advance our values of diversity and inclusion while remaining in compliance with federal law.

A. Application Processing Guidance

With regard to the processing of applications, admissions officials should:

1. Not consider race or ethnicity as a factor in making admissions decisions.
2. Continue to collect applicant-provided race and ethnicity demographic data on admission applications and request for information (RFI) forms. This will maintain the University’s ability to comply with the DOE’s student data collection requirements and assess demographic data relative to past years.

¹ <https://sites.ed.gov/ous/files/2023/09/Diversity-and-Opportunity-in-Higher-Education.pdf>

3. Use available technology to suppress the applicant-provided race and ethnicity demographic data from all individuals involved in admissions decisions. Such individuals may review aggregate demographic data after all admissions decisions are made.
4. Review student admissions policies, rubrics, training, and holistic review practices and update them as necessary to reflect current legal requirements.
5. Reinforce the university's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.
6. Create an assessment process to identify and remove systemic/structural barriers that might limit qualified applicants from applying and enrolling.
7. Review financial aid and scholarship programs and update them as necessary to reflect current legal requirements.

B. Recruitment and Enrollment Management Guidance

With regard to recruitment and enrollment management, admissions officials should:

1. Embrace a broad strategy to further advance diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout the GW community.
2. Maintain GW's test-optional undergraduate admissions policy.
3. Explore the use of essay topics/prompts that provide an opportunity to discuss the student's identity, goals, and lived experiences.
4. Leverage student interviews (when possible).
5. Continue using the "Grit" or resilience rating, which focuses on a student's experience of overcoming adversity. Seek ways to improve or broaden the Student-Applicant Data Profile with information that can provide insight into the applicant's resilience rating, and/or the assets they would bring to the GW community.
6. Continue required implicit bias training for application reviewers. (To schedule training, inquiries should be directed to Caroline Laguerre-Brown, Vice Provost for Diversity, Equity and Community Engagement.)
7. Enhance the composition of admissions selection committees to be more inclusive.
8. Focus on improving first-generation student matriculation and persistence rates, socioeconomic equity, and financial-need awareness levels.
9. Use appropriate strategies to best ensure GW is recruiting a diverse population when recruiting students with special skills.
10. Expand outreach and recruitment efforts to increase connections with traditionally underrepresented prospective students.
11. Establish a consistent mechanism for evaluation of admissions processes to ensure equitable practices are maintained and are legally compliant.
12. Increase the availability of need-based financial aid.

Questions on how to align admissions processes with this guidance should be directed to Jay Goff, Vice Provost for Enrollment and Student Success. The Office of the Provost, the Office for Diversity, Equity, and Community Engagement, and the Office of the Vice President and General Counsel are also available to answer questions regarding this guidance.