

Most Colleges Use Racial Preferences in Admissions, Foe of Affirmative Action Finds

BY PETER SCHMIDT

THE USE of racial and ethnic preferences by college admissions offices is widespread and hardly limited to the elite institutions that the debate over the practice has focused on, according to a report released last week by a group that opposes affirmative action.

Officials at several of the colleges mentioned in the report charged that the organization's research misinterprets their admissions data and presents oversimplified and misleading conclusions.

The report, by the Center for Equal Opportunity, a nonprofit group based in Washington, examined the admissions policies at 47 institutions that it characterized as representing a cross section of public four-year colleges and universities.

Based on a review of applicants' standardized-test scores and high-school class ranks, it concluded that the use of racial and ethnic preferences by college admis-

sions offices is "pervasive and national in scope."

The report said that at least three-fourths of the institutions studied "have a substantial degree of preference in favor of blacks over whites," and that about two-fifths of the institutions favor Hispanic applicants over white ones.

TILTING THE SCALES?

Although the most competitive universities appeared the most intent on tilting the scales in favor of black and Hispanic applicants, according to the center's report, all but a handful of colleges used racial and ethnic preferences to some degree.

The report said, for example, that a black applicant was four times likelier than a white one with the same test scores and high-school grades to be admitted to the University of Minnesota at Duluth; 18 times likelier at Longwood College in Vir-

ginia; and 57 times likelier at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington.

The report noted that all of those institutions were ranked only as "competitive" by *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*, placing them in the middle of the colleges studied in terms of academic quality. Officials at these institutions defended their admissions policies as fair and appropriate and said that all of the students they admitted were academically qualified.

The few institutions that did not use racial or ethnic preferences at all, the report found, were ones that either accept more than 85 percent of applicants or open their doors to anyone.

"The colleges' own data make clear that race and ethnicity are not only a factor in admissions, but are in fact an *overwhelming* factor," said Linda Chavez, the center's president, in a news release that called on Justice Department and Educa-

tion Department officials "to make fighting this discrimination a priority." Ms. Chavez's own unsuccessful bid to join the Bush cabinet, as secretary of labor, had been opposed by critics of her stands on affirmative action.

Among the college officials who argued that the center's report should be treated skeptically was Larry Hincker, a spokesman for Virginia Tech. He said the center's analyses of admissions standards have focused too much on SAT and ACT scores while giving short shrift to the high-school grades of those admitted, which do not differ markedly by ethnicity or race.

Critics of the report also said that it is outdated, given that it dealt with admissions figures from 1995 through 1997, and that many of the colleges covered subsequently changed their admissions policies.

A copy of the report is on the center's Web site (<http://www.ccousa.org>). ■

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