

Letters to the Editor

By Letter to the Editor

Monday, April 18th, 2005

Asian affirmative action

In "Asians Are an Invisible Minority" (4/15), the authors argued that "Asian Pacific Americans" should be treated as a minority in admissions and inferred that they should receive treatment similar to African-American and Hispanic applicants. The authors conflate Asians and Pacific Islanders (who are separate groups), but as the series is about Asian Americans, I wish to comment on that group.

According to the U.S. Census, the average Asian household earns about \$55,000 per year, significantly higher than the \$48,000 white average. Even if we made the argument that Asians are concentrated in expensive urban areas, when compared to the low averages of blacks and Hispanics (who earn \$30,000 and \$33,000, respectively), Asians are not a disadvantaged minority. Poverty rates for Asians are also similar to whites.

But what if we gave Asians their own category in admissions anyway? Generally speaking, the goal of an admissions program is a student body that reflects the composition of the U.S. This would be crippling for Asian applicants, who currently make up 15 to 20 percent of incoming classes, but would now be competing for three to four percent of the space. If we gave them the same admissions standards as black or Hispanic applicants, we would have a heavily Asian school. This would disadvantage poor white applicants without necessarily helping the targeted (poor Asian) community. Placing them in the same pool as African-Americans or Hispanics would hurt those underrepresented groups. No one has developed a computer program to pick out which specific applicants are "disadvantaged," so we must live with a less than ideal admissions world. Based on the statistical evidence, however, it certainly makes sense to pool whites and Asians together, which is why most colleges do so.

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