

Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Undergraduate Admission Policy

March 14, 2024

In July 2023, the Princeton University Board of Trustees established an Ad Hoc Committee on Undergraduate Admission Policy to examine the University's admission policies following the U.S. Supreme Court decisions in *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College* and *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. University of North Carolina* (collectively "SFFA").

This report summarizes the committee's conclusions and recommendations. The committee reviewed relevant data and considered a wide variety of positions, options, and arguments. Deliberations were thorough and wide-ranging.

In brief, the committee reaffirms that the University should act vigorously within the law to achieve the racial and other forms of diversity that are essential to Princeton's excellence and America's future. The committee also finds that, in the changed legal environment, the University's greatest opportunity to attract diverse talent pertains to socioeconomic diversity. It recommends that Princeton adopt specific new goals and commitments to reinforce and enhance its leadership on that issue.

Background and committee process

In addition to considering the impact of the Supreme Court rulings, which prohibit colleges and universities from taking race and ethnicity into account as part of a holistic admission process, the committee was charged with evaluating the impact of the pandemic and the ongoing expansion of the University's undergraduate student body on the University's admission policies and priorities.

The committee's specific charge (Appendix A) was to:

1. *Review historical data and trends relevant to the University's admission policies.*
2. *Review the University's strategy for ensuring that its admission policies and practices are fully compliant with the law.*
3. *Examine existing University priorities for admission policy and their relationship to the University's mission.*
4. *Examine the impact of the recent Supreme Court cases, the pandemic, and the expansion of the undergraduate student body on the University's admission policies.*
5. *Identify any other events, risks, or trends relevant to the assessment of the University's admission policies.*
6. *Recommend to the full Board any adjustment to admission policies that the committee might regard as desirable to maximize the University's ability to achieve its mission.*
7. *Provide to the full Board a report on the committee's work that may, after the Board's review, be shared publicly.*

The committee was asked to issue its report and make any recommendations to the full Board no later than May 2024.

Chaired by trustee Jose Alvarez '85, the committee comprised 15 trustees: Alvarez, Jackson A. Artis '20, Joshua B. Bolten '76, Beth F. Cobert '80, Marisa J. Demeo '88, Janeria A. Easley '16, Blair W. Effron '84, President Christopher L. Eisgruber '83, Lori D. Fouché '91, Philip U. Hammarskjöld '87, Kimberly H. Johnson '95, Carol Quillen '91, Louise S. Sams '79, Bradford L. Smith '81, and Melissa H. Wu '99. University Vice President and Secretary Hilary A. Parker '01 served as secretary to the committee. Dean of Admission and Financial Aid Karen Richardson '93 and Vice President and General Counsel Ramona Romero sat with the committee.

The committee met in person in September and November 2023 and January and March 2024. Additionally, the committee met over Zoom four times (November and December 2023, and January and March 2024). The committee also led the full Board in discussions of its work in January and March of 2024.

Review of the University's strategy for ensuring that its admission policies and practices are fully compliant with the law

The committee engaged in detailed discussion with Vice President and General Counsel Ramona Romero and Dean of Admission and Financial Aid Karen Richardson about the changes that have been made to the University's undergraduate and graduate admissions policies, practices, and processes to ensure compliance with the Supreme Court's ruling in *SFFA*.

The committee found the University's approach to be thorough and thoughtful.

Admission philosophy and key principles

As described in the University's strategic framework, "the University's holistic admissions philosophy ... emphasizes the need to craft a student body consisting of individuals who have the academic talent to benefit from Princeton's rigorous course of study and who possess a range of other characteristics and values that enable them to have a positive impact on one another and on society."

This philosophy imbued the work of the committee, which was also guided by two key principles previously endorsed by the Board and reaffirmed in the course of this committee's work.

1. *Princeton's admission process should be merit-driven, pursuant to an understanding of "merit" derived from the University's goals and defined as seeking students who will:*
 - a) *benefit from and contribute to the very demanding education that Princeton offers; and*
 - b) *use that education to do good in the world.*
2. *Princeton should create more opportunity for more students, including by ensuring that Princeton continues to identify, recruit, matriculate and graduate talented leaders from groups underrepresented in the student body at this and other research universities.*

Recommendations to maximize the University's ability to achieve its mission

In the course of its work, the committee reviewed historical data and trends relevant to the University's admission policies. The data consistently demonstrate that the University's admission philosophy and principles are effective and aligned with Princeton's educational mission. The current undergraduate population at Princeton is stronger academically and more diverse across all measures than at any time in the University's history.

As noted above, in developing its recommendations, the committee enthusiastically reaffirmed the Board's assertion in the 2023 update to the strategic framework that "the University should act vigorously within the law to achieve the racial and other forms of diversity that are essential to Princeton's excellence and America's future."

As part of the University's holistic admission process, the University's dean of admission and her staff have implemented a broad range of measures to attract and enroll talent from all backgrounds and sectors of society. These include: continuing partnership with QuestBridge, a nonprofit organization that connects high-achieving students from low-income backgrounds with some of the nation's best colleges and universities; training application readers to focus on elements of a student's application that indicate resilience, grit, and determination; changing the Princeton-specific questions on the Common Application to elicit information on an applicant's lived experience and how it has shaped them; and launching new initiatives to disseminate broadly information about the University's transfer and financial aid programs.

The committee commends these efforts and the University's ongoing commitment to excellence, diversity, and inclusivity.

The 2023 framework update also called for further expansion of the undergraduate population, recognizing that "[i]n light of the large number of outstanding first-year and transfer students applying for admission to Princeton's undergraduate program, the board believes that the University should continue planning to grow its student body after the current expansion and the [construction] of Hobson College are complete." The committee agrees that the most powerful way that Princeton can create more opportunities for more students from all backgrounds is by increasing the size of its undergraduate population. The University should remain focused on expanding as rapidly as possible, recognizing that the University will need to both renovate current housing stock and add additional housing to be able to do so.

Following thorough review, the committee recommends four adjustments to the University's admission policies to maximize Princeton's ability to achieve its mission.

- 1. The University should be even more aggressive in its efforts to extend recent increases in the socioeconomic diversity of the undergraduate student body, with a focus on attracting and enrolling more students from low-income, middle-income, and upper middle-income families.**

The Board's 2019 update to the strategic framework called for the University to "continue its efforts to attract and support the very best students irrespective of their financial means, including more low- and middle-income students," In 2023, the University made

major improvements to its already best-in-class financial aid program to make a Princeton education more accessible and more affordable to students from more families. Since 2001, Princeton's financial aid grants have consisted entirely of scholarship grants; no student is required to take out a loan. This year, 22 percent of the first-year undergraduate class are eligible for federal Pell Grants and 67 percent are receiving financial aid – with an average grant covering the full cost of tuition. Most families earning up to \$100,000 per year pay nothing for their children to attend Princeton.

The committee noted the University's recognized national leadership in attracting, enrolling, and graduating lower-income students and urges the University to make additional progress. Moving forward, Princeton must remain laser-focused on making vital contributions to the nation and the world through bold, imaginative investments in human capital. A Princeton University education provides an important source of opportunity and social mobility. Princeton must be relentless in its efforts to attract and support more extraordinary young people from low- and middle-income backgrounds. The committee accordingly recommends that the University should aim to ensure that at least 70 percent of the University's undergraduate students qualify for financial aid under the University's generous program, which reaches students from middle-income and upper-middle-income backgrounds as well as low-income students. While recognizing that the share of students eligible for federal Pell Grants will inevitably fluctuate from year to year for a variety of reasons, the committee recommends that the University aspire to have at least 22 percent of its undergraduate student body in that category.

2. The University should continue to grow the size of its transfer program.

Since the reinstatement of the University's transfer admissions program in 2018, the program has grown from around 40 to 100 enrolled students. Princeton's transfer program matriculants are almost entirely community college students and United States military veterans. These students have flourished on our campus and contributed through their lived experience to the campus community in meaningful ways. The committee values the transfer program as a critical means by which the University attracts and enrolls a diverse group of talented students from a broad range of backgrounds. The committee recommends that the University should continue to increase the size of the program over time.

3. The University should aim to ensure that the recruited athlete population is representative of the overall student body, especially as it pertains to academic profile and socioeconomic diversity.

The University's athletic program is grounded on the foundational principles of the Ivy League, including the idea that athletics engagement must be "kept in harmony with the essential educational purposes of the institution" and "hold paramount the academic and personal growth of students." Thus, Princeton's recruited athletes both benefit from and contribute to the academic, co-curricular, and extracurricular life on campus in meaningful and important ways. Their pursuits and accomplishments after graduation are impressive and generally indistinguishable from those of their non-athlete classmates. The committee affirms that athletic achievement is a form of excellence relevant to the goals of a Princeton University education.

The Ivy League's mission statement, and Princeton's educational goals, presuppose that the recruited athlete population is representative of the student body as a whole in both academic and other terms. The committee exhorts the Department of Athletics and the administration to work together to ensure that this principle continues to be honored, and the Board should review compliance at appropriate, regular intervals.

4. The University should monitor the use of its legacy preference to ensure that it is fully consistent with the University's mission, including the University's commitments to academic excellence and socioeconomic diversity.

Princeton provides a limited preference to applicants who are the children of its alumni. This preference, which recognizes the University's special bond with its alumni, benefits a small number of applicants who are extremely well qualified for admission.

The committee considered the legacy preference at length and reviewed a wide variety of arguments about it. The committee noted that the preference receives disproportionate attention in public debates, at least partly because there are many myths and misconceptions about how it functions. Here are the facts. The legacy preference functions as a tie-breaker between equally well-qualified applicants in limited instances. In any given year, the vast majority (around 70 percent) of legacy applicants are denied admission. Of the alumni children who are admitted, the overwhelming majority are admitted regardless of the legacy preference and before any tie-breaker is considered. On average, the preference benefits fewer than 30 students per year, or less than two percent of admitted students. The few students who do benefit from the legacy preference all have academic and extracurricular profiles fully comparable to those of the most talented applicants.

The effects of Princeton University's legacy preference on the racial diversity of its undergraduate student body are also exaggerated and misunderstood. There are two main reasons for this. First, the legacy preference affects so few students that it has little effect on the overall composition of the University's undergraduate population. Second, Princeton's alumni population is increasingly diverse in terms of race and ethnicity; it is expected that the pool of alumni children who apply for admission will soon be at least as diverse as the overall pool in those respects.

Given the small number of applicants affected by the legacy preference in any given year, the increasingly diverse population of applicants who will benefit from the preference over time, the tremendous strength of the legacy applicant pool, and the importance of the University's bonds with its alumni, the committee supports the continued, limited use of the tie-breaker legacy preference, and cautions against any expansion of it.

If not properly managed, the legacy preference may modestly affect the University's ability to achieve its socioeconomic diversity goals. The committee recommends that the University continue to carefully monitor the effects and implementation of the legacy preference to ensure that it is fully consistent with the University's admissions philosophy, including its commitments to academic excellence and socioeconomic diversity.

Conclusion

The University's unwavering commitment to a holistic, merit-driven admission process is essential to its mission. The committee believes that by fortifying Princeton's already powerful commitment to socioeconomic diversity, the University can build effectively on the progress that it has made over the past decade.

The committee hopes its recommendations, if adopted by the full Board, will further the University's ability to "create more opportunity for more students" and "[advance] learning through scholarship, research, and teaching of unsurpassed quality, with an emphasis on undergraduate and doctoral education that is distinctive among the world's great universities, and with a pervasive commitment to serve the nation and the world."

Appendix A

Charge to the 2023 Trustee Ad Hoc Committee on Undergraduate Admission Policy

Princeton University has developed an undergraduate admissions process guided by two key principles:

1. Princeton's admission process should be merit-driven, pursuant to an understanding of "merit" derived from the University's goals and defined as seeking students who will: a) benefit from and contribute to the very demanding education that Princeton offers; and b) use that education to do good in the world.
2. Princeton should create more opportunity for more students, including by ensuring that Princeton continues to identify, recruit, matriculate and graduate talented leaders from groups previously underrepresented in the student body at this and other research universities.

The recent decisions in *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College* and *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. North Carolina* imposed new, legally binding restrictions on the means by which the University may pursue these objectives. The University is making immediate changes to its admission practices to ensure that it is in full compliance with the law and that it can continue to seek and enroll talented students from all backgrounds during this year's admission cycle.

This committee will examine whether the University should make additional changes to admission policies. In addition to considering the impact of the two recent Supreme Court cases, the committee will review evidence about how the pandemic and the recent expansion of the University's undergraduate student body have affected the University's achievement of its admission priorities.

More specifically, the ad hoc committee will

1. Review historical data and trends relevant to the University's admission policies.
2. Review the University's strategy for ensuring that its admission policies and practices are fully compliant with the law.
3. Examine existing University priorities for admission policy and their relationship to the University's mission.
4. Examine the impact of the recent Supreme Court cases, the pandemic, and the expansion of the undergraduate student body on the University's admission policies.
5. Identify any other events, risks, or trends relevant to the assessment of the University's admission policies.
6. Recommend to the full Board any adjustment to admission policies that the committee might regard as desirable to maximize the University's ability to achieve its mission.

7. Provide to the full Board a report on the committee's work that may, after the Board's review, be shared publicly.

We anticipate that the ad hoc committee will complete its work and make any appropriate recommendations to the Board not later than its May 2024 meeting. Because these issues are of interest to the entire Board, we expect the committee to report regularly to the full Board about its deliberations.