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Percentage Plans: An Inadequate Substitute for Affirmative Action in Higher Education Admissions

JENNIFER L. SHEA*

INTRODUCTION

For the first time since its 1978 ruling in Regents of the University of California v. Bakke, the Supreme Court recently decided to hear two cases challenging the use of racial preferences in the admissions process at the University of Michigan. Although the Court has declined to consider the issue for over two decades, controversy over the consideration of race in admissions policies has plagued a number of public

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1. Adam Cohen, Coloring the Campus, TIME, Sept. 17, 2001, at 48 (quoting a statement by Richard Black, U.C. Berkeley’s Associate Vice Chancellor for admissions and enrollment, in response to a question regarding the effectiveness of ensuring campus diversity without taking a candidate’s race into account).

universities. The use of affirmative action by public universities in their admissions policies was eliminated in California, Florida, Georgia, Texas, and Washington. Elimination of these programs occurred in three different forums: in the courts, in the voting booth, and by executive order. Fearing drastic declines in minority enrollment on college campuses, higher education officials have been pursuing race-neutral alternatives for preserving diversity in the absence of affirmative action. In particular, California, Florida, and Texas have each instituted percentage plans guaranteeing admission to students who meet the state’s class rank requirement. This Note evaluates the effectiveness of these percentage plans on ensuring student body diversity at public colleges and universities.

Before undertaking an evaluation of the percentage plans implemented in these individual states, it is important to understand the impetus behind their enactment. Part I of this Note reviews the current attacks on affirmative action by the courts, the voters, and the governor of Florida. In analyzing the position of the courts on affirmative action, Part I discusses Bakke, the Supreme Court’s most recent precedent on affirmative action in college admissions, as well as the latest decisions on this issue in the Fifth, Sixth, Ninth, and Eleventh Circuits. In Part II, this Note outlines the benefits of learning in a diverse environment in order to demonstrate why college administrators are fiercely trying to preserve campus diversity in the absence of affirmative action. Part III evaluates the effectiveness of percentage plans in California, Florida, and Texas as race-neutral attempts to maintain campus diversity. Finally, Part IV of this Note highlights the emerging shortcomings of percentage plans and compares the effectiveness of percentage plans to affirmative action. This Note concludes that percentage plans do not serve as an adequate substitute to affirmative action for the preservation of educational diversity.

I. ATTACKS ON AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IN THE COURTS, IN THE VOTING BOOTH, AND BY EXECUTIVE ORDER

Before examining the implementation of percentage plans as a race-neutral alternative to affirmative action, it is important to consider the status of affirmative action in college admissions. The use of affirmative action in college admissions policies has come under attack in three critical areas. First and foremost, the federal courts have seen an increasing number of challenges to admissions policies at public universities where racial preferences are utilized in the admissions process. Second, affirmative action programs have been repealed by voters in both California and Washington through the passage of ballot initiatives prohibiting the use of racial
preferences in public education. Lastly, the governor of the state of Florida unilaterally forbade the use of affirmative action and racial preferences in admissions by promulgating an executive order to that effect. In this Part, the attacks on affirmative action in college admissions are discussed further.

A. In the Courts: The Future of Affirmative Action

Recently, most attacks on affirmative action have taken place in the federal courts. In particular, white applicants who were denied admission to state universities have challenged the use of racial preferences in admissions policies as a violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Within the past five years, the Fifth, Sixth, Ninth, and Eleventh Circuits have each considered admissions policies that granted preferences during the admissions process to students of color. In the Fifth and Eleventh Circuits, the admissions policies at the University of Texas Law School and University of Georgia, respectively, were declared unconstitutional for failing to satisfy the test of strict scrutiny for the use of classifications based upon race. In the Sixth and Ninth Circuits, the admissions policies at the University of Washington Law School and the University of Michigan Law School, respectively, were found to satisfy the test of strict scrutiny based on student body diversity as a compelling government interest. All four of these decisions relied heavily upon interpretations of Bakke, the Supreme Court's only case dealing with the constitutionality of racial preferences in college admissions. Therefore, it is imperative to examine the major holdings that emerged from the Court's splintered opinion in Bakke before examining each of these lower court decisions individually.

1. The Supreme Court Doctrine: Regents of the University of California v. Bakke

Twenty-five years ago, the Supreme Court considered the use of affirmative action in university admissions in Bakke. This case was brought by Allan Bakke, a white applicant who was denied admission twice from the Medical School of the University of California at Davis. Bakke alleged "the Medical School's special admissions program [designed to ensure admission of a certain number of minority students] operated to exclude him from the school on the basis of his race." In a fragmented

11. See infra Part I.B.
12. See infra Part I.B.
15. See Hopwood v. Texas, 78 F.3d 932 (5th Cir. 1996); Johnson v. Bd. of Regents of the Univ. of Ga., 263 F.3d 1234 (11th Cir. 2001).
18. Id.
19. Id.
20. Id. at 276.
21. Id. at 277-78.
opinion, a majority of the Court affirmed the California Supreme Court’s ruling that the admissions policy violated the Fourteenth Amendment, and ordered Bakke’s admission to the University of California at Davis Medical School. However, a different majority of the Court reversed the California Supreme Court’s prohibition of any consideration of race in the admissions process. Justice Powell’s majority opinion analyzed the admissions policy at the University of California at Davis Medical School as “undeniably a classification based on race and ethnic background.” In considering the extent of its analysis, the Court stated, “[r]acial and ethnic distinctions of any sort are inherently suspect and thus call for the most exacting judicial examination.” Therefore, the Court applied a test of strict scrutiny, and examined whether the admissions policy was “precisely tailored to serve a compelling government interest.”

The Court first evaluated the interests advanced by the University of California to justify their use of racial preferences in admissions. The Court held that the University’s interest in assuring “some specified percentage of a particular group [be admitted] merely because of its race or ethnic origin . . . must be rejected not as insubstantial but as facially invalid.” From this general premise, the Court went on to reject the interest of remedying the effects of societal discrimination by characterizing it as “an amorphous concept of injury that may be ageless in its reach into the past.” However, the Court did hold that states had “a legitimate and substantial interest in ameliorating, or eliminating where feasible, the disabling effects of identified discrimination.” The Court emphasized that remedial efforts for past discrimination must be supported by judicial, legislative, or administrative findings of constitutional or statutory violations. The University of California failed to establish in the record that the admissions policy was a response to identified discrimination. Therefore, the Court rejected each of the asserted compelling interests, and held that the school’s admissions policy did not satisfy the test of strict scrutiny required for classifications based on race.

In addition to the principal holdings above, there is another portion of the Bakke opinion that still receives its share of debate today. The concurring opinion written by Justice Brennan supported Justice Powell’s opinion reversing the California Supreme Court’s prohibition of race as a consideration in the admissions process. However,
Justice Brennan and Justice Powell disagreed on what type of consideration constitutes a compelling interest in satisfaction of the Court's test of strict scrutiny on racial classifications. For Justice Brennan, the Fourteenth Amendment "does not bar the preferential treatment of racial minorities as a means of remediying past societal discrimination." In addition, Justice Brennan would use a somewhat less stringent standard than strict scrutiny to evaluate this remedy. He states, "to justify such a classification an important and articulated purpose for its use must be shown." Therefore, Justice Brennan disagreed with Justice Powell's reliance solely upon identified past discrimination as a compelling government interest, and would further allow for the remedy of societal discrimination. While Justice Brennan takes a much broader view of what constitutes a compelling government interest, he did not join or concur with the portion of Justice Powell's opinion that concludes student body diversity can be a compelling interest.

In sum, the fractured nature of the Court's opinion has caused a great deal of confusion as lower courts have tried to interpret Bakke. While Justice Powell authored the opinion for the Court and provided the important swing vote, he created a majority on two very distinct issues: (1) affirming the California Supreme Court's holding that the admissions policy violated the Fourteenth Amendment, and (2) reversing the California Supreme Court's prohibition of race as a factor in the admissions policy. In addition, a substantial portion of his opinion was without support from either majority. In particular, no one joined the part of his opinion on student body diversity, which concluded that "[e]thnic diversity . . . is only one element in a range of factors a university properly may consider in attaining the goal of a heterogeneous student body." As addressed below, each and every court confronts the question of whether student body diversity is a compelling government interest, as it considers the legality of affirmative action in university admissions.

2. The Future of Affirmative Action in the Court of Appeals

In four recent cases, the Court of Appeals for the Fifth, Sixth, Ninth, and Eleventh Circuits had the task of using Bakke to examine the constitutionality of the admissions policies at the University of Texas Law School, the University of Michigan Law School, the University of Washington Law School, and the University of Georgia undergraduate program. Each of these suits focused on admissions formulas that

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35. See id. at 328.
36. Id.
37. Id. at 361-62.
38. Id. at 361.
39. See id. at 324-80 (Brennan, White, Marshall, & Blackmun, JJ., concurring in part and dissenting in part).
40. See infra Part I.A.2.
41. 438 U.S. at 314.
42. See Hopwood v. Texas, 78 F.3d 932 (5th Cir. 1996); Grutter v. Bollinger, 288 F.3d 732 (6th Cir. 2002); Smith v. Univ. of Wash., Law Sch., 233 F.3d 1188 (9th Cir. 2000); Johnson v. Bd. of Regents of the Univ. of Ga., 263 F.3d 1234 (11th Cir. 2001).
denied white students admission while granting preferences to students of color. In addition to the resemblances between the admissions policies employed by these universities, the compelling government interest of preserving student body diversity advanced before each court was similar. Despite the commonalities among these cases, the courts each used a different analysis to arrive at their holdings. In fact, the decisions of the Sixth and Ninth Circuits to uphold the admissions programs were opposite from the holdings of the Fifth and Eleventh Circuits, which declared the admissions policies unconstitutional. Therefore, it is important to examine each of these cases individually in order to fully understand the current state of affirmative action in the courts.

a. The Fifth Circuit: Hopwood v. Texas

In Hopwood v. Texas, the Fifth Circuit prohibited the University of Texas Law School from continuing to use race as a factor in its admissions policy. Four white residents of Texas who were denied admission to the law school in 1992 alleged they were subject to unconstitutional racial discrimination by the school’s admissions process. The admissions process in question established a lower range of LSAT and GPA requirements for African American and Mexican American candidates, and maintained separate application evaluations and waiting lists for these candidates. The Fifth Circuit analyzed the law school’s admissions process using a test of strict scrutiny because “any governmental action that expressly distinguishes between persons on the basis of race [must] be held to the most exacting scrutiny.”

The court outlined the strict scrutiny analysis with two questions: “(1) Does the racial classification serve a compelling government interest, and (2) is it narrowly tailored to the achievement of that goal?” The court began its analysis by directly addressing two of the purposes the law school purported to serve with its admissions policy: obtaining the benefits of a diverse student body and remedying the effects of past discrimination. The court looked to the Bakke opinion to determine whether ensuring student body diversity was a compelling government interest. Because

43. See infra Part I.A.2.a-d (discussing the specific challenges to the admissions policies in greater detail).
44. See infra Part I.A.2.a-d (describing preservation of student body diversity as the compelling interest advanced by the government in each of the four cases).
45. See infra Part I.A.2.a-d (analyzing the reasoning for the holdings of the four different U.S. court of appeals decisions).
47. 78 F.3d 932 (5th Cir. 1996).
48. Id. at 934.
49. Id. at 938.
50. Id. at 936-38.
51. Id. at 940.
52. Id.
53. See id. at 941. Relying on Bakke, the Fifth Circuit dismissed the other two purposes advanced by the law school: “Justice Powell reasoned that the second and third justifications—remedying societal discrimination and providing role models—were never appropriate.” Id. at 942.
54. See id. at 941-45.
portion of Justice Powell's opinion on student body diversity as a compelling
government interest was never adopted by a majority of the Court in Bakke.55 the Fifth
Circuit dismissed this purpose and prohibited the use of race as a factor to ensure
student body diversity.56 The court explained that student body diversity is "simply too
amorphous, too insubstantial, and too unrelated to any legitimate basis for employing
racial classifications."57 The Fifth Circuit then concluded that "the Court appears to
have decided that there is essentially only one compelling state interest to justify racial
classifications: remedying past wrongs."58
The remainder of the court's opinion in Hopwood focused on whether the law
school satisfied its burden of proving a "strong basis in the evidence for its conclusion
that remedial action was necessary."59 The Fifth Circuit explained that the Supreme
Court requires "some showing of prior discrimination by the governmental unit
involved before allowing limited use of racial classifications in order to remedy such
discrimination."60 The Fifth Circuit rejected the law school's argument that the
University of Texas system was the "appropriate governmental unit for measuring a
constitutional remedy." 61 Instead, the court held that in order for the law school to
remedy past wrongs with a racial preference program, the wrongs must have occurred
at the law school itself.62 Because the law school provided no evidence that it was
remedying past wrongs occurring at the law school, the court held that "the law school
has failed to show a compelling state interest in remedying ... past discrimination
sufficient to maintain the use of race in its admissions system."63 Therefore, the court
found it unnecessary to determine whether the law school's admissions program was
narrowly tailored in the absence of any compelling state interest.64
In sum, the Fifth Circuit's opinion in Hopwood leaves very little room for state
universities in Texas to maintain an admissions policy based on racial preferences. The
court rejected all but one compelling government interest—remedying past identified
discrimination by a particular governmental unit. This is a difficult standard for most
college admissions policies to meet, and has led some to conclude that "it is unlikely
that any affirmative action program at a Texas public university will be able to
withstand Hopwood-level scrutiny."65

55. See supra notes 40-41 and accompanying text.
56. Hopwood, 78 F.3d at 945-46, 948.
57. Id. at 945 (quoting Metro Broad., Inc. v. Fed. Communications Comm'n, 497 U.S. 547, 612 (1990) (O'Connor, J., dissenting)).
58. Id. at 944.
59. Id. at 948 (quoting City of Richmond v. J.A. Croson Co., 488 U.S. 469, 500 (1989) (plurality opinion)).
60. Id. at 949 (quoting Wygant v. Jackson Bd. of Educ., 476 U.S. 267, 274 (1986) (plurality opinion of Powell, J.)).
61. Id. at 951.
62. Id. at 952.
63. Id. at 955.
64. Id.
b. The Eleventh Circuit: *Johnson v. Board of Regents of the University of Georgia* 66

In *Johnson*, the Eleventh Circuit took a different approach than the Fifth Circuit in *Hopwood* by striking down the University of Georgia admissions policy because it was not narrowly tailored to meet a compelling state interest of student body diversity. 67 Three white female Georgia residents who were denied admission to the freshman class at the University of Georgia ("UGA") for the fall of 1999 brought this case. 68 They alleged that the admissions policy granted numerical points to non-white and male applicants that were not given to female applicants. 69 While the Eleventh Circuit affirmed the lower court's holding that the admissions program was unconstitutional, the court did so for a different reason than the lower court. 70 Similar to the Fifth Circuit in *Hopwood*, the lower court held that student body diversity is not a compelling state interest sufficient to withstand the strict scrutiny required of racial classifications. 71 The Eleventh Circuit, however, refused to resolve the question of whether student body diversity is a compelling interest. The court felt "it [was] important to underscore that the constitutional viability of student body diversity as a compelling interest is an open question, and ultimately . . . warrants consideration by the Supreme Court." 72 Therefore, the court assumed for the sake of argument that student body diversity was a compelling interest, and rejected the UGA admissions policy because it was not narrowly tailored to serve that interest. 73

In considering whether the UGA admissions policy was narrowly tailored to serve the compelling interest of student body diversity, the Eleventh Circuit utilized the *Paradise* factors adopted by the Supreme Court in an employment case involving a challenged affirmative action program. 74 The Eleventh Circuit also looked to a recent case challenging a race-conscious admissions policy in a kindergarten program in which the Fourth Circuit modified the *Paradise* factors when applying them to the challenged admissions policy. 75 Using the basic framework from both of these cases,
the Eleventh Circuit created a list of four factors for measuring whether the admissions policy was narrowly tailored:

(1) whether the policy uses race in a rigid or mechanical way that does not take sufficient account of the different contributions to diversity that individual candidates may offer; (2) whether the policy fully and fairly takes account of race-neutral factors which may contribute to a diverse student body; (3) whether the policy gives an arbitrary or disproportionate benefit to members of the favored racial groups; and (4) whether the school has genuinely considered, and rejected as inadequate, race-neutral alternatives for creating student body diversity.

Using these four factors, the Eleventh Circuit concluded that the UGA admissions policy was not narrowly tailored to achieve its goal of student body diversity. The court considered the first and second factors together finding the admissions policy was inflexible by mechanically awarding bonus points to each non-white applicant and excluding race-neutral factors that would reflect a candidate's potential contribution to diversity. The court illustrated its point by stating, "[a] white applicant from a disadvantaged rural area in Appalachia may well have more to offer a Georgia public university such as UGA—from a standpoint of diversity—than a non-white applicant from an affluent family and a suburban Atlanta high school." The court recognized the amount of time individual evaluation of applicants would require at a large institution like the University of Georgia. However, the court had little sympathy stating, "if UGA wants to ensure diversity through its admissions decisions, and wants race to be part of that calculus, then it must be prepared to shoulder the burden of fully and fairly analyzing applicants as individuals and not merely as members of groups when deciding their likely contribution to student body diversity."

Next, the court considered the third factor and concluded that "UGA's policy is not only rigid and incomplete, the benefit it awards each and every non-white applicant is wholly, and concededly arbitrary" and disproportionate. UGA conceded that there was no statistical basis for use of a 0.5-point figure to reflect an applicant's race in the admissions formula. In addition, the court held that it was disproportionate to the

195 F.3d 698, 706 (4th Cir. 1999).
76. Johnson, 236 F.3d at 1253.
77. Id. at 1254.
78. Id. at 1254-55.
79. Id. at 1253.
80. Id. at 1256. The court quoted UGA's President as stating, "I know that the difference between the way we have to do it because of size and the way everybody else does it is so dramatically different that that's part of the problem. I would guess that every other institution in the state is probably able to read individual files." Id. In 2002, the University of Georgia received 12,800 applications and offered acceptance to 8200 applicants. The University of Georgia, First Year Admissions, http://www.admissions.uga.edu/freshman-adm/index.html (last visited Nov. 7, 2002).
81. Johnson, 236 F.3d at 1256.
82. Id. at 1257.
83. Id. (The court quotes UGA's admissions director as acknowledging that "the choice of a particular point bonus for race [was] made 'out of the blue.'").
other diversity related factors because only one other factor in the formula—a Scholastic Aptitude Test ("SAT") score, or American College Test ("ACT") equivalent, between 1200-1600—is worth more than race (1.0 as compared to 0.5). The final factor the court examined was whether UGA considered race-neutral alternatives before employing their race-based admissions policy. The court found the very opposite was true as "the record [was] clear that UGA has been committed, and remains committed to using race in its freshman admissions process until it is precluded from doing so."

Finally, the court noted that UGA "makes little serious effort to defend its policy under Paradise or any other narrowly tailoring test." Instead, the court says "UGA tries to analogize its policy to the Harvard plan and thereby bring its policy under Justice Powell's opinion in Bakke." Justice Powell originally used the Harvard plan in Bakke as an example of an admissions policy that considers race as well as other race-neutral factors while individually evaluating applicants. However, the Eleventh Circuit rejected this argument concluding, "his discussion of the Harvard Plan was entirely dicta." Even using the Harvard plan, the Eleventh Circuit felt that UGA’s plan failed to withstand scrutiny because it is not "flexible enough to consider all pertinent elements of diversity" and assess each applicant "fully and fairly as an individual." Although the Eleventh Circuit’s holding in Johnson prevents UGA from further consideration of race in its admissions process, it does not unconditionally forbid the consideration of race in college admissions like the Fifth Circuit in Hopwood. Instead, the Eleventh Circuit established a framework for considering whether an admissions policy was narrowly tailored to serve the goal of ensuring a diverse student body. The court’s holding would not prohibit an admissions policy carefully designed to individually evaluate each applicant’s contribution to diversity using race in addition to other race-neutral factors. However, the university must also prove it considered race-neutral alternatives prior to establishing a race-conscious admissions policy.


In Smith v. University of Washington, Law School, the Ninth Circuit used a much different interpretation of Bakke than the Fifth and Eleventh Circuits. This case involved a challenge by three white applicants who were each denied admission to the
University of Washington Law School during 1994 and 1996. The applicant who was denied admission in 1996 reapplied and was accepted in 1999, after the law school terminated its race-based admissions policy. While the case was in the district court, the voters of the state of Washington passed an initiative banning preferential treatment on the basis of race in public education. The procedural history of this case is unusual because the case appeared before the Court of Appeals after the admissions policy was eliminated. Thus, the court dismissed the petitioners’ request to enjoin the law school from operating a preferential admissions program because “that part of the controversy had become moot.”

The court did address the district court’s finding that “under Supreme Court precedent race could be used as a factor in educational admissions decisions, even where that was not done for remedial purposes.” In considering whether Bakke permitted the use of student body diversity as a compelling state interest, the court surmised, “[t]he difficulty with which we are presented is . . . none of the other Justices fully agreed with Justice Powell’s opinion, so we are left with the task of deciding just what the Supreme Court decided.” The Ninth Circuit looked to the Supreme Court for guidance on interpreting this fractured opinion. The Ninth Circuit, citing Marks v. United States, explained, “the holding of the Court may be viewed as that position taken by those Members who concurred in the judgments on the narrowest grounds.” It is with this guidance that the Ninth Circuit arrived at its conclusion that “educational diversity is a compelling government interest that meets the demands of strict scrutiny of race-conscious measures.”

By combining both Justice Powell’s opinion and Justice Brennan’s concurrence, the Ninth Circuit concluded that “[a] majority would have allowed for some race-based considerations in educational institutions, both under Title VI and under the Fourteenth Amendment. Thus, a race-based possibility must be taken to be the actual rationale adopted by the Court.” The Ninth Circuit deduced that while “Justice Brennan did not specifically say that ‘race’ could be used to achieve student body diversity . . . there was no need for him to do so in light of his view about past societal discrimination.” Thus, the court surmised that Justice Brennan would have agreed with Justice Powell’s opinion that student body diversity is a compelling state interest. The court concludes its opinion with an acknowledgement that “since Bakke . . . the [Supreme] Court has not looked upon race-based factors with much favor.” However, the Ninth Circuit defends its departure from the Court’s rationale by quoting

97. Id. at 1191-92.
98. Id.
100. Smith, 233 F.3d at 1192.
101. Id. at 1193.
102. Id. at 1196.
103. Id. at 1198.
104. Id. at 1199 (quoting Marks, 430 U.S. 188, 193 (1977)).
105. Id. at 1201.
106. Id. at 1199.
107. Id. at 1200.
108. Id.
the Court’s advice: “[T]he Court of Appeals should follow the case which directly controls, leaving to this Court the prerogative of overturning its decisions.” In fact, the Ninth Circuit points out that the “flaw” in the Hopwood decision “stem[s] from its failure to properly apply the teachings of Marks.”

In sum, the Ninth Circuit took the Court’s advice and used Justice Brennan’s concurrence to construct a favorable holding for student body diversity as a compelling government interest. In its interpretation of Bakke, the Ninth Circuit went even further than the Eleventh Circuit by allowing student body diversity as a compelling state interest in college admissions policies. Although an injunction against the University of Washington’s admissions program became moot with the passage of Washington Initiative Measure 200 prohibiting racial preferences, the Ninth Circuit’s holding is still an important decision on affirmative action in college admissions.

d. The Sixth Circuit: Grutter v. Bollinger and Gratz v. Bollinger

In December of 2001, the Sixth Circuit, sitting en banc, heard two lawsuits challenging the University of Michigan’s use of affirmative action—one case involving undergraduate admissions and the other involving law school admissions. At the district court level, the two cases resulted in completely opposite holdings based on different reasoning from separate judges. In Grutter v. Bollinger, U.S. District Court Judge Bernard A. Friedman ruled that the law school’s use of affirmative action was unconstitutional because racial diversity was not a compelling state interest, and the law school’s admissions policy was not narrowly tailored to achieve that interest. In Gratz v. Bollinger, U.S. District Court Judge Patrick J. Duggan ruled that the use of affirmative action in undergraduate admissions was constitutional and justified by the educational benefits of diversity.

In May 2002, the Sixth Circuit released its opinion in the law school admissions case; however, it failed to decide the undergraduate admissions case. Some

109. Id. (quoting Rodriguez de Quijas v. Shearson/Amp. Express, Inc., 490 U.S. 477, 484 (1989)).
110. Id. at 1200 n.9.
111. Id. at 1193.
112. 288 F.3d 732 (6th Cir. 2002).
115. Gratz, 122 F. Supp. 2d 811. The Sixth Circuit has yet to decide this case on appeal. See infra notes 120-23 and accompanying text.
118. 137 F. Supp. 2d at 872.
119. 122 F. Supp. 2d at 820.
commentators speculated that the Sixth Circuit would reach the opposite result in the undergraduate admissions case.\textsuperscript{122} While the Sixth Circuit concluded in a five-four decision that the law school's admissions policy was constitutional as a means of maintaining diversity, the admissions policy used by the undergraduate program could potentially be perceived as a larger "plus factor" than envisioned by Justice Powell's opinion in \textit{Bakke}.\textsuperscript{123}

In \textit{Grutter}, the majority began its analysis by looking at \textit{Bakke} to determine whether the law school has a compelling interest in achieving a diverse student body.\textsuperscript{124} The majority held that Justice Powell's opinion was binding upon the Sixth Circuit under \textit{Marks} and that \textit{Bakke} remains precedent until the Supreme Court decides otherwise.\textsuperscript{125} Similar to the Ninth Circuit,\textsuperscript{126} the majority found that "the rationales supporting the Court's judgment need not overlap on essential points in order to provide a holding that binds lower courts."\textsuperscript{127} The Sixth Circuit held that Justice Powell's strict scrutiny and Justice Brennan's intermediate scrutiny of racial classifications taken together were evidence that Justice Powell's opinion was \textit{Bakke}'s narrowest holding.\textsuperscript{128} The court added that Justice Brennan's approval of Justice Powell's Harvard plan in a footnote provided support for determining that a majority of the Court was in favor of diversity as a compelling interest.\textsuperscript{129} In addition, the court relied upon the Supreme Court's subsequent use of \textit{Bakke} under \textit{Metro Broadcasting, Inc. v. Federal Communications Committee}.\textsuperscript{130}

Having determined that the University of Michigan's law school had a compelling interest in achieving a diverse student body under \textit{Bakke}, the second part of the majority's analysis focused upon whether the law school's admissions policy was narrowly tailored to meet that compelling interest.\textsuperscript{131} The Sixth Circuit extracted two guidelines for evaluating race-conscious admissions policies from Justice Powell's reasoning in \textit{Bakke}: "(1) segregated, dual-track admissions systems utilizing quotas for under-represented minorities are unconstitutional; and (2) an admissions policy modeled on the Harvard plan, where race and ethnicity are considered a 'plus,' does not offend the Equal Protection Clause."\textsuperscript{132} In evaluating whether the law school's

\textsuperscript{122} \textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{123} See id. The undergraduate admissions policy grants a twenty-point bonus on a 150-point scale to applicants who are African American, Hispanic, or American Indian, which is the equivalent to raising an applicant's G.P.A. by an entire letter grade. \textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{124} 288 F.3d at 738.

\textsuperscript{125} \textit{Id.} at 739.

\textsuperscript{126} See supra notes 104-10 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{127} \textit{Grutter}, 288 F.3d at 740.

\textsuperscript{128} \textit{Id.} at 741-42 (citing \textit{Bakke}, 438 U.S. at 304-07 (opinion of Powell, J.)).

\textsuperscript{129} \textit{Id.} at 742-43 (citing \textit{Bakke}, 438 U.S. at 326 n.1 (Brennan, J., concurring)).

\textsuperscript{130} 497 U.S. 547, 568 (1990), overruled on other grounds by Adarand Constructors, Inc. v. Pena, 515 U.S. 200, 227 (1995). The Sixth Circuit pointed out that Justice Brennan's opinion for the Court in \textit{Metro Broadcasting} cited \textit{Bakke} for the proposition that "'a diverse student body' contributing to a 'robust exchange of ideas' is a 'constitutionally permissible goal' on which race-conscious university admissions programs may be predicated." \textit{Grutter}, 288 F.3d at 743 (quoting \textit{Metro Broadcasting}, 497 U.S. at 568 (quoting \textit{Bakke}, 438 U.S. at 311-13 (opinion of Powell, J.))).

\textsuperscript{131} \textit{Grutter}, 288 F.3d at 744.

\textsuperscript{132} \textit{Id.} at 745-46.
admissions policy was an unconstitutional quota system or a constitutional policy like the Harvard plan, the Sixth Circuit began by comparing the law school’s policy to the Harvard plan. The court found the law school’s consideration of race in its admissions policy “virtually indistinguishable from the Harvard plan Justice Powell approved in Bakke.” In particular, the court noted that the law school maintains a single admissions program with no separate process for minority applicants. The law school’s admissions policy “considers more than an applicant’s race or ethnicity” as a component of diversity, taking into consideration factors such as leadership, work experience, unique talents or interests, and the student’s letters of recommendation.

The Sixth Circuit rejected the plaintiff’s contention that the law school’s pursuit of a “critical mass” of minority students is the “functional equivalent” of a quota system because the law school does not have fixed goal or target. In addition, the Sixth Circuit dismissed the reasons offered by the District Court in determining that the consideration of race and ethnicity was not narrowly tailored. After rejecting the District Court’s rationale, the Sixth Circuit upheld the University of Michigan’s law school admissions policy as narrowly tailored to achieve the compelling interest of a diverse student body. The court concluded, “the Law School intends to consider race and ethnicity to achieve a diverse and robust student body only until it becomes possible to enroll a ‘critical mass’ of under-represented minority students through race-neutral means.”

The strongly worded dissent of Judge Boggs rejected the majority’s notion that Justice Powell’s educational diversity rationale in Bakke was binding on the Sixth Circuit. Instead, the dissent addressed the diversity rationale on the merits using the Supreme Court’s holding in Adarand to determine if the use of race in admissions satisfies a compelling government interest and if the law school’s admissions policy was narrowly tailored to serve that interest. The dissent concluded that student body diversity was not a compelling government interest based upon the lack of an adequate definition of diversity and a logical stopping point for the use of racial preferences at

133. See id. at 746-47.
134. Id. at 747.
135. Id. at 746.
136. Id. at 747.
137. Id. at 747-48.
138. Id. at 749-52. The District Court held that
(1) the Law School did not define “critical mass” with sufficient clarity; (2) the apparent lack of a time limit on the Law School’s consideration of race and ethnicity; (3) the admissions policy was “practically indistinguishable” from a quota system; (4) the Law School did not have a logical basis for considering the race and ethnicity of African-Americans, Native Americans and Puerto Ricans; (5) the Law School did not “investigate alternative means for increasing minority enrollment.”
Id. at 749 (quoting Grutter, 137 F. Supp. 2d at 850-52).
139. Id. at 752.
140. Id.
141. See id. at 776-88 (Boggs, J., dissenting).
142. Id. at 788.
143. Id. at 789-93.
the University of Michigan’s law school. In deciding that the admissions policy was not narrowly tailored, the dissent viewed the admissions policy as a quota system. In addition, the dissent criticized the law school for failing to seek race-neutral alternatives and consider factors other than race and ethnicity that contribute to diversity.

In addition to the conflicting opinions between the majority and dissent on the issue of affirmative action in admissions, they were also sharply divided on the procedural context in which the Sixth Circuit heard both the University of Michigan cases. In a procedural appendix to his dissenting opinion, Judge Boggs asserts that the majority manipulated the court’s scheduling and procedures to ensure a favorable ruling for the law school. In particular, he alleges that the majority failed to hear the case until two judges critical of affirmative action had gone into semi-retirement and were unable to hear the case. A lengthy concurrence by Judge Nelson refutes Judge Boggs’s allegations and describes them as “nothing short of shameful.”

On the heels of this bitterly divided Sixth Circuit opinion, controversy surrounded the issue of whether the Supreme Court would decide to hear the University of Michigan cases together, separately, or not at all. In their petition for certiorari, the plaintiffs for Grutter v. Bollinger stated, “[T]here can be no serious doubt that the use of racial preferences in university admissions presents an issue of great national importance.” The plaintiffs for Gratz v. Bollinger—the undergraduate case—asked the Supreme Court to take up their case despite the fact that the Sixth Circuit was still in the process of deciding it. Both plaintiffs argued that the two cases taken together would give the Court a “more substantial record within which to consider and rule upon the common principles.” On the other hand, the University of Michigan argued that the Supreme Court should let the Sixth Circuit’s ruling stand.

144. Id. at 793-95.
145. Id. at 800-03.
146. Id. at 806-08.
147. See id. at 810-14 (“Procedural Appendix” written by Judge Boggs); id. at 752-58 (concurring opinion of Judge Nelson responding to the “Procedural Appendix”).
149. See Grutter, 288 F.3d at 812 n.44. Judge Boggs’s assertions received the attention of U.S. Representative, F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr., chairman of the House of Representatives Judiciary Committee, who, in his capacity to review judicial misconduct, asked the Sixth Circuit to provide the committee with documents related to the court’s handling of the case. See Key Congressman to Examine U.S. Appeals Court’s Procedures in Deciding U. of Michigan Case, CHRON. HIGHER EDUC., July 26, 2002, at A25, available at http://chronicle.com/weekly/v48/i46/46a02502.htm.
150. Grutter, 288 F.3d at 753.
153. Id.
On December 2, 2002, the Supreme Court announced that it would hear both of the University of Michigan cases. The Court received an abundance of amicus briefs both supporting the plaintiffs and defending the University of Michigan. The Court is expected to hear oral arguments on April 1, and render a decision by July. While the public eagerly awaits the Court’s decision, this Note does not seek to predict the Court’s decision in the University of Michigan cases. Instead, this Note provides an analysis of the current federal appellate case law solely as background for considering whether percentage plans are an effective substitute for affirmative action.

3. The Split of Authority Among the Circuits

The four cases appearing before the U.S. Court of Appeals on the use of affirmative action in college admissions policies illustrate the various ways of interpreting the Supreme Court’s fractured opinion in Bakke. In Hopwood, the Fifth Circuit dismissed student body diversity as a compelling government interest, and concluded that the only compelling government interest approved by the Supreme Court was remedying past discrimination. Alternatively, the Eleventh Circuit in Johnson left the question of whether student body diversity is a compelling government interest unanswered, and instead found that the admissions policy was not narrowly tailored to serve a compelling government interest. The Ninth Circuit in Smith upheld an admissions policy by combining Justices Powell and Brennan’s opinions, and reasoning that

http://chronicle.com/daily/2002/09/2002092001n.htm. The thirty-eight education associations, who cosigned an amicus brief supporting the University of Michigan before the Sixth Circuit, also support the University’s current request that the Supreme Court not hear the case. Sheldon E. Steinbach, Vice President and General Counsel of the American Counsel on Education, believes it would be foolish for the University to risk losing their win in the appellate court. "They have a Big Ten victory, and there’s no reason to go for an NCAA championship." Id.


156. See Peter Schmidt, Bush Briefs in Michigan Cases Leave Little Room to Use Race in Admissions, CHRON. HIGHER EDUC., Jan. 31, 2003, at A23; Peter Schmidt, Dozens of Supreme Court Briefs Show Widespread Support for U. of Michigan’s Admissions Policies, CHRON. HIGHER EDUC., Feb. 18, 2003, available at http://chronicle.com/daily/2003/02/2003021801n.htm. The most notable of the briefs on behalf of the plaintiffs were the briefs by the Bush administration urging “an extremely narrow view of when colleges should be able to consider race in admissions.” Schmidt, Bush Briefs, supra, at A23. Over sixty briefs were submitted defending the University of Michigan. Schmidt, Dozens of Supreme Court Briefs, supra, available at http://chronicle.com/daily/2003/02/2003021801n.htm. The authors of these briefs included members of Congress, attorney generals of twenty-two states, sixty-four Fortune 500 companies, twenty-nine former top-ranking officers and civilian leaders of the military, civil rights groups, public and private colleges, and education associations. See id.

157. Schmidt, Dozens of Supreme Court Briefs, supra note 156.

158. See supra Part I.A.2.a.

159. See supra Part I.A.2.b.
student body diversity was a compelling government interest. Finally, the Sixth Circuit upheld the University of Michigan’s law school admissions policy based upon the compelling state interest to preserve diversity; however, the Sixth Circuit failed to determine whether the admissions policy utilized by the University of Michigan’s undergraduate program is constitutional. The wide range of holdings among just four circuits of the U.S. Court of Appeals exhibits the lack of clarity that will continue to plague this issue. Accordingly, it is imperative that the Supreme Court reconsiders this issue and clarifies once and for all that student body diversity is a compelling government interest capable of surviving strict scrutiny so long as the admissions policy is narrowly tailored to serve that interest.

B. The Ballot Initiative and the Executive Order

In addition to the courts, other attacks on affirmative action have taken two powerful political forms in recent years: the ballot initiative and the executive order. In 1996, California voters were the first to adopt a ballot initiative to eliminate discrimination and “preferential treatment to, any individual or group on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in the operation of public employment, public education, or public contracting.” The voters of the state of Washington adopted a similar initiative two years later. While the ballot initiative is often referred to as the most direct form of democracy, some question whether it is an accurate measure of public opinion on issues, especially in the area of civil rights.

Opponents of ballot initiatives believe that they are often successful because their language misleads and confuses voters. In civil rights initiatives, the wording is often “politically compelling but ambiguous language of liberty and equality,” so voters are not aware of the total impact their vote will have. Despite their support for these initiatives, data shows that the majority of Americans support the preservation of diversity. According to a national survey by the American Council on Education,

160. See supra Part I.A.2.c.
161. See supra Part I.A.2.d.
162. See Sara Hebel, U. of Georgia Won’t Ask Supreme Court to Reverse Decision Striking Down Use of Race in Admissions, CHRON. HIGHER EDUC., Nov. 12, 2001, available at http://chronicle.com/daily/2001/11/2001111201n.htm (explaining that University of Georgia officials believed that the University of Michigan lawsuits would “present a stronger defense of racial preferences before the Supreme Court”).
165. See, e.g., Barbara S. Gamble, Putting Civil Rights to a Popular Vote, 41 AMER. J. POL. SCI. 245, 246 (Jan. 1997) (arguing that the political majority has used “its direct legislative powers to deprive political minorities of their civil rights”).
166. See, e.g., id.
167. Id. at 249.
88% of Americans agreed with having "students of different races, cultures, and backgrounds in elementary, secondary, and higher education." Also, "[m]ore than three-quarters of the respondents agreed with the statement that universities should be allowed to take action to ensure diversity in their student bodies."

Given that the overwhelming majority of the public believes that ensuring diversity at colleges is important, unilateral efforts to end affirmative action in college admissions should be viewed as even more suspect than ballot initiatives. In 1999, the Governor of Florida, Jeb Bush, promulgated such a unilateral effort by executive order. The executive order prohibited "the use of racial or gender set-asides, preferences or quotas in admissions to all Florida institutions of Higher Education."

In addition to the courts, these two political actions, referenda and executive orders, have eliminated the use of affirmative action in university admissions in California, Florida, and Washington. Higher education leaders have become increasingly concerned that the racial composition of their campuses will be drastically changed in the absence of affirmative action. Therefore, university officials are fighting for affirmative action and other ways to preserve diversity on their campuses to counteract the efforts to eliminate these programs by the courts in Texas and Georgia, the voters in California and Washington, and the governor in Florida. Before examining the percentage plans in California, Florida, and Texas, it is important to understand why preserving race as a component of diversity is such an important goal that universities are searching for creative ways to maintain racial diversity in the absence of affirmative action.

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF PRESERVING STUDENT BODY DIVERSITY

Over the last ten years, the minority population in the United States increased by thirty-five percent. The proportion of students of color attending college, however, "continue[s] to lag behind" the proportion of whites. In 2000, 28% whites completed a bachelor's degree compared to only 17% of African Americans and 11% of Hispanics. According to the Educational Testing Service, "[a]mong minority groups, only Asian youth will be attending college in numbers roughly proportionate to their share of the U.S. college-age population." When releasing a recent report, Investing in People: Developing All of America's Talent on Campus and in the Workplace, a coalition of corporate chief executives and university presidents declared, "[t]he

169. Id. at 32.
170. Id.
172. Id. § 3.
173. Cohen, Coloring the Campus, supra note 1, at 48.
174. Id.
175. INVESTING IN PEOPLE, supra note 168, at 13.
176. Id. (referring specifically to African American and Hispanic students).
177. Id.
178. Id. at 26.
United States faces a social and economic crisis if diversity in higher education isn’t drastically improved." 179

This report outlined several ways in which ethnic and racial diversity benefits democratic society, learning, and business. 180 First, students’ exposure to diverse perspectives on campus enhances their participation in democratic society, including involvement in community and volunteer efforts, politics, and activities that promote racial understanding. 181 Second, students who are exposed to diversity are better critical thinkers and have greater social and interpersonal skills than students who are not exposed to diversity. 182 Finally, many of these benefits are displayed in the work environment where college graduates exposed to diverse perspectives exhibit an “improved ability to think critically, to understand issues from different points of view, and to collaborate harmoniously with co-workers from a range of cultural backgrounds.” 183

It is important to remember that the benefits of learning in a diverse environment “accrue to both white and minority students who come into contact with people of diverse backgrounds and with diverse ideas and information.” 184 In addition, education of all people benefits the national economy. The Educational Testing Service “estimates that ‘if Hispanics and African Americans had the same education and commensurate earnings as whites,’ there would be ‘an upsurge in national wealth’ of $113 billion annually for African Americans and $118 billion for Hispanics.” 185 In the wake of September 11, Robert T. Jones, the President of the National Alliance of Business, has argued, “[d]iversity is another form of national security.... As we fight to eradicate terrorism and maintain safety on our shores, we must protect our economic stability by investing in our most valuable resource, our diverse citizenry.” 186

The report offers several recommendations for investing in a diverse society, including three recommendations targeted at institutions of higher learning. 187 First, the report challenges policy makers to “increase financial aid to students who need it.” 188 The report illustrates the importance of this recommendation by stating, “a low income student who scores in the top quartile on standardized tests is no more likely to attend


180. INVESTING IN PEOPLE, supra note 168, at 14.

181. Id. at 29-30.

182. Id. at 30-31.

183. Id. at 14.


185. Id. at 15.


187. See INVESTING IN PEOPLE, supra note 168, at 37-42.

188. Id. at 39.
college than a high-income student who scores in the lowest quartile." 188

Second, the report challenges university officials to "create campus environments that value diversity and provide support that helps all students complete their studies." 189 Third, the report challenges university officials to "intensify efforts to develop and implement thoughtful, innovative, and results-orientated approaches to enrolling greater numbers of minority students, despite the uncertainty resulting from recent court rulings and referenda." 190 It is with these recommendations and the uncertain future of affirmative action in higher education admissions in mind that the rest of this Note evaluates the viability of percentage plans as a race-neutral approach to ensuring diversity on college campuses in California, Florida, and Texas.

III. ANALYSIS OF PERCENTAGE PLANS IN CALIFORNIA, FLORIDA, AND TEXAS

In light of the important benefits that a diverse student body brings to a college education, "[b]arring these institutions from considering race directly . . . [has brought] forth ingenious efforts to minimize the consequent loss of diversity by adopting seemingly race-neutral policies." 191 One of the race-neutral strategies employed by California, Florida, and Texas has been percentage plans, which guarantee admission to a state university to students graduating within a certain% of their high school class. 192 The remaining sections of this Note individually evaluate each of these percentage plans by considering the impetus behind the adoption of the plan and the plan's impact on enrollment of students of color compared to the enrollment under affirmative action. In addition, this analysis will consider whether the percentage plan has been successful recruiting students of color and whether the state has needed to implement additional programs to ensure diversity in the absence of affirmative action.

A. California's Four Percent Plan

The University of California was forced to abandon affirmative action in its admissions policies when the voters of California enacted Proposition 209, which forbade the state to discriminate or grant preferential treatment on the basis of race. 193 The year after Proposition 209 was enacted, enrollment of African American students dropped 17% in the entire University of California system, and more than 50% at the University's most selective campuses of Berkeley and Los Angeles. 194 In order to maintain the diversity of its student body, the Board of Regents adopted a plan to admit all students who graduated within the top 4% of their high school class. While qualifying students were not guaranteed admission to the school of their choice, they

189. Id.
190. Id. at 40.
191. Id. at 41.
193. See infra Part III.A-C.
194. For an up-to-date chronology of the events following the passing of Proposition 209, see the Affirmative Action and Diversity Project Website, available at http://aad.English.ucsb.edu/pages/Prop-209.htm (last visited Nov. 15, 2001).
195. Cohen, Coloring The Campus, supra note 1, at 49.
were guaranteed admission to one of eight campuses in the University system. At the announcement of the Four Percent Plan, California's governor, Gray Davis, stated, "[w]hat we're going to get now are high achievers with guts and heart, people who have flourished maybe not in the best of surroundings." In the first year of the Four Percent Plan, the effect on minority enrollment was mixed. The admission of African American, Hispanic, and American Indian students accounted for 18.6% of in-state students, which was lower than the 18.8% admitted in 1997 under affirmative action. While the number of applications from African American students did increase, African Americans still represented only 4% of the total number of applications compared to their 7% share of California's high school graduates. The 2002 enrollment levels for students of color are 19.1%, which finally surpasses the number admitted under affirmative action. While some critics of affirmative action declare these numbers a success, it is difficult to tell whether the increase is a direct result of the Four Percent Plan or the University's increased outreach and recruitment of students of color.

After administrative problems prevented many students at some high schools from taking advantage of the Four Percent Plan during its first year, the University proposed several creative alternatives to increase its enrollment of students from high schools in low-income areas. The Board of Regents approved a new program extending the Four Percent Plan to students who rank between 4 and 12.5% in their high school class. These students would be offered provisional admission to a U.C. campus contingent upon their completion of an approved two-year course of study at a community college. According to the Office of the President's website, this program will be instituted as soon as funding for the program is secured.

In September 2001, the Board of Regents gave preliminary approval to a plan broadening their admissions criteria for all applicants and eliminating admissions decisions based entirely on academic factors. The current admissions process uses a
two-tiered approach where one-half to three-quarters of applicants are selected based solely on academic criteria while the rest are accepted using both academic and other factors, including special talents and experiences with adversity.\textsuperscript{207} The new comprehensive plan would judge all applicants based on "a single set of criteria"\textsuperscript{208} including academic factors and personal attributes such as "success in overcoming economic and educational disadvantages."\textsuperscript{209} Although some members of the Board of Regents challenged the revised admissions plan, it was approved with the addition of a statement that the policy prohibits the use of racial preferences in reviewing applications.\textsuperscript{210}

In the spring of 2002, the regents began considering a proposal to eliminate the Scholastic Aptitude Test I ("SAT") as a requirement of admission based on a recommendation by the President of the University of California, Richard C. Atkinson.\textsuperscript{211} Atkinson's concerns about reliance on the SAT in admissions culminated with a visit to his granddaughter's private school where he discovered twelve-year-old students were spending hours each month studying verbal analogies.\textsuperscript{212} He concluded, "America's overemphasis on the SAT is compromising our educational system."\textsuperscript{213} While critics argue that colleges "need a common yardstick in an era of grade inflation,"\textsuperscript{214} Atkinson believes that the university should "look at applicants in a comprehensive, holistic way" rather than "narrowly defined quantitative formulas" based on standardized test scores.\textsuperscript{215} In addition, "[a]n intended effect of the change is to attract more minority students."\textsuperscript{216} Given the mean SAT for African Americans in the year 2000 was 198 points below that of whites, more underrepresented students of color may be admitted to U.C. campuses without the SAT as a central requirement in the admissions process.\textsuperscript{217}

While these efforts created a gain in the number of students of color admitted to the University of California system over affirmative action levels, Four Percent Plan applicants are still only guaranteed admission to one of the university's eight
PERCENTAGE PLANS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

...campuses. Thus, minority students who once qualified for admission at the top U.C. campuses before the elimination of racial preferences have been redistributed to less selective campuses.218 At Berkeley, the university’s most selective campus, enrollment of African American students fell 57% and Hispanic students dropped 34% between 1997 and 1999.219 At Riverside, the university’s least exclusive campus, admissions during the same time period rose 54% for African American students and 66% for Hispanic students.220 Therefore, the numbers suggest that the absence of affirmative action has led to a two-tiered system in the university.221 Some critics of the current system argue that the declining numbers of students of color at the upper levels impact the whole system.222 In particular, students are deprived the opportunity to learn in the type of diverse environment they will experience when they graduate.223

The most recent enrollment figures for 2002 still have the most competitive campuses admitting fewer students of color than those admitted under affirmative action.224 In particular, only 15.9% of Berkley’s students are students of color today compared to 22% before affirmative action was prohibited in California.225 In addition, the first two years of the program helped Hispanic students and students from rural schools more than African American students according to an analysis by the university system’s Board of Regents.226 These recent findings indicate that California’s high schools may be less segregated than state officials originally realized.227 All groups except for African American and American Indian students gained in enrollment under the Four Percent Plan.228 Students admitted from rural schools improved from 6.4% of the traditional applicant pool to 14% under the percentage plan.229 Hispanic students comprised 17.3% of students guaranteed admission under the percentage plan compared to 15.7% of the traditional pool.230 However, only 2.8% of African American students were automatically admitted under the percentage plan compared to 4.7% of the overall statewide pool.231

While the University of California system has attempted to preserve diversity at its campuses by implementing a percentage plan as a race-neutral alternative, the university is still not satisfied with the extent of its results. University officials continue to investigate and implement additional ways of impacting diversity on their campuses.

219. Id.
220. Id.
221. Barbara Whitaker, Minority Rolls Rebound at University of California, N.Y. TIMES, Apr. 5, 2000, at A16.
222. See, e.g., id.
223. Cohen, When the Field Is Level, supra note 218, at 33.
224. Fogg, supra note 200.
225. Id.
227. Id.
228. Id.
229. Id.
230. Id.
231. Id.
in the absence of affirmative action. In a short time, the university has expanded its percentage plan, revised its admissions policy, and contemplated dropping the SAT requirement. These innovative efforts exhibit that the University of California is still struggling to find a race-neutral alternative that generates the same diversity results as affirmative action.

B. Florida’s Talented 20 Program

In 1999, Florida eliminated affirmative action and the use of racial preferences by an executive order as part of Governor Bush’s One Florida Initiative. At the same time, Florida instituted the “Talented 20” program, guaranteeing admission to a state university in Florida to students in the top 20% of their high school senior class. The program also provides a twenty million dollar increase in the state’s need-based financial aid—an increase of 43 percent. Remarking that Florida’s state university system is now 32% minority, Governor Bush announced that it was time to replace race-based admissions policies with achievement-based ones, “and that this can be done while still improving and enhancing the diversity of [the] university system.”

Governor Bush’s statement that the state university system would be able to sustain its student body diversity under the percentage plan was challenged by enrollment figures a year after the plan went into effect. In the last year students were admitted using racial preferences, African American students comprised nearly 12% of the freshman class at the University of Florida, the state’s most elite public university. In 2001, one year later, the freshman class was only 6 to 7% African American under the state’s new percentage plan. The Provost believed the decline would have been worse if the university had not changed its application process and increased minority recruitment efforts. At the other public universities, minority enrollments stayed the same or were slightly higher.

The most recent enrollment figures for 2002 show that the proportion of minority

232. See supra notes 202-16 and accompanying text.
233. See id.
236. GOVERNOR BUSH’S EQUITY IN EDUCATION PLAN, supra note 234, at 12.
237. Id. at 10. However, “the numbers are skewed by Florida A&M University, the historically black university that in 1998 claimed a 99% minority student body. In contrast, the state’s oldest and most selective college, the University of Florida, is only 5.5% black and 9% Hispanic.” Grace Frank, Regents Likely to OK One Florida, TAMPA TRIB., Feb. 2, 2000, available at 2000 WL 5572954.
239. Id.
240. Id.
241. Id.
242. Id.
students has remained unchanged.\(^{243}\) After the dramatic declines in minority enrollment during the first year of the program, the University of Florida's enrollment of African American students increased by 43 percent.\(^{244}\) Among Florida's other public schools, Florida Gulf Coast University increased minority enrollment by 58% (144 students); Florida Atlantic University increased 13% (947 students); and Florida International University also increased 13% (2,256 students).\(^{245}\) However, Florida A&M University, the New College of Florida, and the University of West Florida all experienced declines in enrollment of students of color, by 10 percent, 6 percent, and 18 percent, respectively.\(^{246}\)

The President of the University of Florida, Charles E. Young, was a strong critic of Governor Bush's decision to end affirmative action.\(^{247}\) Young issued a statement responding to the release of the 2002-2003 enrollment figures by the Governor's Office; he said: "The numbers speak for themselves and underscore our commitment to diversity. We intend to continue these efforts and hope we will be even more successful in bringing minority students to campus in years to come."\(^{248}\) The university also attributed the increases to a "variety of techniques, including: fostering closer ties with three low-performing high schools and offering scholarships to their top graduates; expanding the staff of the admissions office; holding student-recruitment conferences; offering additional scholarships; and purchasing a telephone system that automatically places calls to prospective students."\(^{249}\)

While the impact on enrollment may not have been as dramatic as critics expected, they still have concerns with the Talented 20 program. A report by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights charged that the plan did not account for the poor quality of the state's K-12 schools.\(^{250}\) Because of inadequate course offerings at their high schools, students graduating from low-performing schools might not have the nineteen pre-collegiate credits required by the state university system.\(^{251}\) However, the second component of Governor Bush's Equity in Education Plan may help to alleviate some of

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245. Kiernan, supra note 243.

246. Id.

247. Id.

248. Id.

249. Id.


251. Id.
the disparity between the state's schools.\textsuperscript{252} The Governor's K-12 initiatives are "designed to enhance performance among minority and low-income students in [Florida's] failing schools."\textsuperscript{253} These initiatives include funding for mentoring and tutoring programs and funding for every tenth grade student to take the preliminary SAT ("PSAT").\textsuperscript{254} In addition, the state plans to expand the availability of Advanced Placement ("AP") courses and college preparatory courses as well as to create alliances with colleges and universities.\textsuperscript{255} These initiatives were implemented at the same time affirmative action was replaced with Florida's Talented 20 program.\textsuperscript{256} Therefore, they will not have an impact on the quality of high schools that college-bound students are attending.\textsuperscript{257}

Even in its early stages, it was evident that the Talented 20 program implemented in Florida was not as well designed as the percentage plan in California. Administratively, the program has been criticized for not clearly outlining how students can participate and whether they will have to pay multiple application fees if they are applying to more than one state institution.\textsuperscript{258} Like the percentage plan in California, Florida's program has been attacked for guaranteeing students a spot at a state university not the university of the student's choice.\textsuperscript{259} Most importantly, Florida's plan is flawed by the poor quality of public schools that many students of color attend. Although the governor is implementing changes to reduce the inequities among Florida's public schools, current students of color will not benefit from these changes. Thus, they may not be eligible to take advantage of the percentage plan, which severely impedes the success of the plan as an alternative to affirmative action.

C. The Texas Plan

Following the Fifth Circuit's ruling in \textit{Hopwood v. Texas},\textsuperscript{260} minority enrollment at the state's flagship universities, the University of Texas-Austin and Texas A&M, plummeted. At the University of Texas-Austin, the number of African American freshmen enrolled dropped 34 percent, and the number of Latino freshman fell 4.3 percent.\textsuperscript{261} At Texas A&M, the number of African American freshman dropped 29 percent, and the number of Latino freshman fell 13 percent.\textsuperscript{262} In order to curtail these declining enrollments, the state implemented the "Texas Plan," which guaranteed admission to any Texas state university for students graduating in the top 10% of their high school class.\textsuperscript{263} The Texas% plan is unique because it guarantees admission to the

\begin{itemize}
\item 252. \textit{See Governor Bush's Equity in Education Plan, supra} note 234, at 7-10.
\item 253. \textit{Id.} at 7.
\item 254. \textit{Id.} at 7, 9.
\item 255. \textit{Id.} at 8-9.
\item 256. \textit{See id.}
\item 257. \textit{See Toward An Understanding of Percentage Plans, supra} note 250, at ¶ 13.
\item 258. \textit{Id.} at ¶ 18.
\item 259. \textit{Id.} at ¶ 16. \textit{See also Governor Bush's Equity in Education Plan, supra} note 233, at 12-15.
\item 260. 78 F.3d 932 (8th Cir.), \textit{cert. denied}, 518 U.S. 1033 (1996).
\item 262. \textit{Id.}
\end{itemize}
state university of the student's choice rather than admission to one of the state's universities like the Florida and California plans. The 1999 figures show a "negligible impact" for the percentage plan at the University of Texas-Austin. Respectively, African American and Hispanic students account for 14 and 4% of enrollment, as they did in 1996 before racial preferences were eliminated. A report by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights stated that in addition to the percentage plan, the increase in diversity could be attributed to various factors aimed at encouraging minority students to attend the University of Texas-Austin. Some of these efforts included alumni-sponsored minority scholarships, new scholarships targeted at students in the top 10% of their graduating class, and a law requiring that posters explaining the top 10% plan and how to apply be displayed in every high school.

Both Texas A&M and the University of Texas have attempted to increase utilization of the percentage plan by students of color. The University of Texas has offered scholarships to students from seventy high schools in heavily African American and Latino areas. Texas A&M tried to go even further by conditionally approving a plan that would offer admission to students in the top 20% of 250 low-performing high schools as long as those students meet the university's minimum admissions standards for courses and test scores. Opponents, however, charge that the plan is "an effort to circumvent Hopwood" by using low-performing schools as a substitute for high schools comprised of mostly minorities. Thus, these opponents urged the Attorney General to declare it illegal. The designers of the plan argue, "the schools were identified without taking race into account." Instead, they were chosen using a combination of eight factors including high dropout rates, limited English proficiency, and low passage on the statewide achievement test. While the plan was awaiting review by the State Attorney General to determine whether it would withstand Hopwood-level scrutiny, the university decided to withdraw the program. 


266. Id. See also University of Texas-Austin, Office of Admissions, Implementation and Results of HB 588, available at www.texas.edu/student/research/reports/ (last visited Nov. 15, 2001).


268. Id.

269. Cohen, Coloring the Campus, supra note 1, at 48.


271. Id.

272. Id.


274. Id.

275. See Jennifer K. Ruark, Texas A&M U. Withdraws Admissions Proposal that Was
university maintains that the program is not racially based and explains that the withdrawal was prompted by the possibility of changes in the program.276

Similar to California, Texas has continued to search for ways to impact enrollment of students of color at its state universities in the wake of Hopwood. The percentage plan has only had a minor impact on student body diversity. In addition, university officials are concerned that students from the state’s poorer high schools are still not utilizing the program. To aggressively target declining enrollments by students of color, the state universities have expanded their outreach and recruitment efforts and increased their scholarships. Therefore, similar to the situations in California and Florida, it is difficult to know how much credit to attribute to the percentage plan for maintaining student body diversity given the other factors at work.

IV. ARE PERCENTAGE PLANS BETTER THAN AFFIRMATIVE ACTION?

After examining the percentage plans in California, Florida, and Texas, three major problems emerge that inhibit the success of these programs. First, and most importantly, the percentage plans exploit the poor quality of K-12 education for minority students in these states. Related to this problem, percentage plans also often displace high minority achievers with minority students from less academically challenging high schools who may not be as well prepared to attend college. Lastly, percentage plans do not address declining minority enrollment within the states’ graduate and professional schools. Therefore, a race-neutral indicator such as class rank is not an adequate substitute for affirmative action, which evaluates minority applicants upon a more individualized basis.

A. Poor Quality of Secondary Schools

The poor quality of K-12 education for African American and Hispanic students has become a “national problem.”277 The disparity between the public high schools attended by African American and Hispanic students and those attended by mostly white students is a central problem in the use of admissions policies based upon class rank to ensure diversity. These disparities are present in each of the three states, which implemented percentage plans as an alternative to affirmative action. In Florida, schools are ranked on a scale ranging from “A” to “F”. Of the sixty-five Florida schools ranked at the D and F levels, 72% of the enrolled students are African American and Hispanic compared to only 26% of which are white.278 Students in these schools are more likely to be “assigned to less-qualified teachers, have had fewer curriculum opportunities, and have been expected to achieve less than students at higher-performing schools.”279

In California, the inequities in public high schools become apparent by considering the number of Advanced Placement (“AP”) classes offered at various high schools.

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276. See id.
277. TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF PERCENTAGE PLANS, supra note 250, at ¶ 30 n.39.
278. GOVERNOR BUSH’S EQUITY IN EDUCATION PLAN, supra note 234, at 2-4.
279. TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF PERCENTAGE PLANS, supra note 250, at ¶ 14 n.15.
According to the State Education Department, 129 public high schools do not offer any AP classes. In addition, African American and Hispanic students comprise 45% of the high school population, but only 13% of AP test takers. Therefore, the educational quality and opportunities available at schools attended by students of color are substantially different than those available at mostly white schools. In Texas, one critic of the Texas Plan remarked that the “very success [of the percentage plan] to produce a diverse student body depends on continuing the de facto segregation of Texas high schools.” These inequities are segregated among public high schools in poor urban areas that are mostly minority, which leads critics to conclude that percentage plans further exploit these inequities by relying upon them to ensure diversity on college campuses while doing nothing to improve the quality of secondary education.

B. Displacement Effects of Percentage Plans

Another troubling phenomenon occurring from the substitution of affirmative action with percentage plans is the displacement effects. The displacement effect occurs when minority students, who attended competitive high schools but did not meet the class rank requirement, are turned down even though they would have been admitted under affirmative action. Instead, these students have to compete for fewer available “at large” places despite the fact that they have greater academic ability than many students from less competitive high schools who meet the class rank requirement. Although the percentage plan may ensure the same level of minority enrollment as affirmative action, the primary difference is the quality of the minority students who are admitted. Given the disparity among public high schools discussed above, many of the minority students admitted under the percentage plan may not be as prepared for college as those students admitted under affirmative action.

California limited their percentage plan to students in the top 4% in order to avoid such a displacement effect. While California does not collect data on student grades...
from individual high schools, a Chronicle of Higher Education study conducted over two-dozen interviews with highly ranked students attending weak high schools. The results found that while these students maintain close to A averages in mostly college-preparatory classes, their SAT scores are substantially lower than their peers at more competitive high schools. At seventy-five of 570 high schools in Florida, students with a C+ average still ranked in the top 20% of their class in 1997-1998. Thus, students from less competitive schools may have the required class rank to benefit from percentage plans. However, it is likely that these students are replacing students from more competitive and integrated schools who may be unable to obtain the required class rank and take advantage of the percentage plan. Because the percentage plans in Texas and Florida guarantee admission to a much greater% of high school graduates, a greater number of students from competitive and integrated high schools will be impacted by the displacement effect.

In comparing percentage plans to affirmative action, one administrator at a competitive high school in Florida remarked that affirmative action programs helped minority students at her school who scored above the national average on the SAT and took rigorous courses, but had low GPAs and class ranks as a result. She explained that “[t]hese are the kids that succeeded in college because of where they went to high school, not because of where they ranked in their senior class.” Therefore, it is ironic that “while the end of affirmative action was intended to reward individual merit in college admissions, the effort to attain the over-riding moral objective of racial justice through other means may have actually weakened the merit-based system of admissions.”

C. The Absence of a Solution for Graduate and Professional Schools

Percentage plans only address enrollment at the undergraduate level. They do nothing to impact the declining enrollment of students of color at graduate and professional programs. In California, the most dramatic effects of ending affirmative action were experienced by graduate enrollment. At UCLA’s law school, African American enrollment dropped from 6.2% to less than one% between 1996 and 1999. During this same time period, Hispanic enrollment at the law school dropped from 14.8% to 6.2 percent. At U.C. Berkeley’s law school, enrollment of African American students declined from 7.6% to 2.6% between 1996 and 1999. Hispanic enrollment at the law school also fell from 10.6% to 5.9% during these years. These

290. Id.
291. Id.
292. Id.
293. Id.
294. Id.
296. TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF PERCENTAGE PLANS, supra note 250, at ¶ 26 n.35.
297. See id. at ¶ 19 n.28.
298. Id.
299. Id.
300. Id.
dramatic drops threaten the future diversity of the legal profession. In addition to law schools, declining enrollments are echoed by other graduate and professional programs in California, such as medical and business schools.\textsuperscript{301} The potential for similar effects on graduate and professional school enrollment as a result of the elimination of racial preferences in admissions policies is possible in both Florida and Texas. Therefore, "[t]he decline of access of minority students to outstanding legal and medical education may, over the long run, be one of the greatest social costs of ending affirmative action."\textsuperscript{302}

Given the problems of substituting percentage plans for affirmative action discussed above, it is apparent that class rank is not an adequate substitute for affirmative action. Although percentage plans have maintained minority enrollments, the academic quality of the minority students admitted has declined. The primary reason for this decline is the vast inequities among public high schools attended by African Americans and Hispanics and those attended by mostly white students. The quality of minority students admitted under percentage plans will not improve until the public school systems in poor minority areas improve. With the inequities among the nation's public schools, percentage plans are not an effective alternative to affirmative action because they do not admit the same caliber of minority students as the use of race as a component of diversity in admissions policies.

**CONCLUSION**

One of the major catalysts behind the enactment of percentage plans was the attacks on affirmative action through the courts, the ballot box, and the executive order. The ballot initiative in California\textsuperscript{303} and the executive order in Florida\textsuperscript{304} are definitive prohibitions on the use of racial preferences in college admissions. However, the status of race-based admissions policies in the courts is surrounded by greater uncertainty. In particular, a majority of the Supreme Court has yet to answer the question of whether race as a criterion of student body diversity is a compelling government interest satisfying strict scrutiny.\textsuperscript{305} While the Fifth, Sixth, Ninth, and Eleventh Circuits have each weighed in with different opinions,\textsuperscript{306} there is a need for greater clarification by the Supreme Court on the future of student body diversity. In particular, the Court must directly confront whether diversity is a compelling government interest justifying the use of affirmative action programs in college admissions.

With the lack of certainty on this issue, states have pursued race-neutral alternatives for preserving student body diversity on their campuses. One of the most popular measures has been the percentage plan.\textsuperscript{307} However, an analysis of the percentage plans in California, Florida, and Texas demonstrates that these plans are not an adequate substitute for affirmative action. Most importantly, these plans threaten to weaken the academic quality of state universities. Under percentage plans, the minority students

\textsuperscript{301. TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF PERCENTAGE PLANS, supra note 250, at ¶ 26.}
\textsuperscript{302. Policies of Opportunity, supra note 282, at ¶ 26.}
\textsuperscript{303. See supra Part I.B.}
\textsuperscript{304. See supra Part I.B.}
\textsuperscript{305. See supra Part I.A.1.}
\textsuperscript{306. See supra Part I.A.2.}
\textsuperscript{307. See supra Part III.}
admitted are less prepared for college than their peers admitted under affirmative action. Race-neutral strategies like percentage plans attempt to measure whether a student will succeed in college based on one factor, class rank. They do not generate the same results as admissions policies that individually evaluate a student's contribution to campus diversity based on a range of factors including race. Therefore, the best way to ensure campus diversity is to consider race as "one element in a range of factors . . . in attaining the goal of a heterogeneous student body," as Justice Powell wrote in Bakke. 308 Before Justice Powell's vision can become a reality, a majority of the Supreme Court must decide once and for all that student body diversity is a compelling government interest.