

To: America's College Presidents and Boards of Trustees

We write to ask your institution to commit to evidencing a meaningful commitment to diversity and socioeconomic mobility by eliminating unfair admissions practices like the legacy preference that undermine equity, access, and a basic commitment to fairplay. To be sure there are many more actions colleges and universities can and should take to support diversity and socioeconomic mobility, but we believe an important first step is to end what we believe is an unprincipled practice of conferring admission preferences based on alumni relationship. Amherst College to its credit has recently joined Johns Hopkins University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the University of California system and others in ending legacy admissions.

To be clear, there is no good reason for maintaining the legacy preference in admissions. It does not promote diversity, does not reward achievement, and is inefficient at best as a fundraising tool.

Legacy preferences are rooted in a history of ugly discrimination. As Jerome Karabel details in his book, *The Chosen*, legacy preferences arose at elite institutions in the 1920s and 1930s as a way to limit the enrollment of Jewish immigrants whose qualifications outstripped those from long-standing well-to-do families that Ivy League colleges preferred to see on campus. To this day, the legacy preference continues to favor wealthy, white families that have lived in America for generations and benefited from past racial segregation and discriminatory policies. A 2018 lawsuit against Harvard revealed that 77% of legacy admits were white, while just 5% were Black and 9% were Hispanic/Latinx. At the University of Notre Dame, there were five times as many legacies in Class of 2024 as there were Black students.

Make no mistake, the value of the legacy preference benefit is substantial, and in the zero-sum economy of highly selective institution admissions it punishes applicants who are equally if not more accomplished than descendants of alumni. A well-regarded study of highly selective universities by Michael Hurwitz showed that legacies enjoy a 45 percentage point advantage in their admit rates when compared to equally qualified applicants. The sociologist Thomas Espenshade quantified the legacy preference boost as equivalent to adding 160 points to the SAT score of relevant applicants. Data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen has shown that legacy students have SAT scores that are lower than the institutional mean and tend to earn lower grades once in college compared to their counterparts.

With regard to fundraising, in 2010, Chad Coffman, Tara O'Neil, and Brian Starr investigated alumni giving at the top 100 national universities between 1998 to 2007 to gauge the value of a legacy preference policy. They found "no evidence that legacy-preference policies themselves exert an influence on giving behavior." Coffman and his team also examined giving at seven institutions that dropped legacy preferences during the period of the study. Again, they found "no short-term measurable reduction in alumni giving as a result of abolishing legacy preferences."

Low-income, racial minority, and first generation students, who need college degrees now more than ever have enough disadvantages in the college admissions process. Now is the time for all universities to remove at least one of these barriers.

We urge you to end the un-American, unfair legacy preference admissions policy at your institution right away.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Education Reform Now

ACCEPT

All4Ed

Alliance of Latino Administrators and Superintendents (ALAS)

Center for American Progress

Council of Administrators of Special Education

Democrats for Education Reform

Ed Mobilizer

Education Trust

Hildreth Institute

National Center for Teacher Residencies

National College Attainment Network (NCAN)

National Superintendents' Roundtable

New America

1000 Women Strong

Public Higher Education Network of Massachusetts (PHENOM)

Richard Kahlenberg, The Century Foundation

Richard Reeves, Brookings Institution

The Institute for College Access and Success (TICAS)

Third Way

UnidosUS

Young Invincibles