

Have Race-Biased Admissions Improved American Higher Education?

A Critique of Patricia Gurin's Expert Report on the Benefits of Diversity at the University of Michigan

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Dr. Gurin is a social psychologist and Chair of the Department of Psychology at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. She is one of two psychologists who submitted expert reports in support of the University of Michigan affirmative action cases (*Gratz, et al. v. Bollinger, et al.*, No. 97-75321 (E.D. Mich.), *Grutter, et al. v. Bollinger, et al.*, No. 97-75928 (E.D. Mich.)), which are now before the U.S. Supreme Court. Her report addresses most directly the issue of educational benefit. It describes survey research based on the responses of students with different college "diversity experiences" during and after college. Her report concludes: "This work consistently confirms that racial diversity and student involvement in activities related to diversity have a direct and strong effect on learning and the way students conduct themselves in later life including disrupting prevailing patterns of racial separation." Dr. Gurin's report has been subjected to vigorous criticism on statistical grounds by Wood & Sherman (see also a response by Gurin² and rebuttal by Wood and Sherman³) and others (see the issue of *Psychology, Public Policy and Law* (2000, Vol. 6), edited by Wendy Williams, and an article by Zuriff (2002⁴).

The first section of my critique briefly summarizes what is being asserted. The second section summarizes the scientific basis for the assertions. Much of this section echoes comments made at length by others, but I do add a point-by-point comparison between raced-based *applicant profiling*, which is practiced by the University of Michigan and defended by Dr. Gurin, and *racial profiling*, for law-enforcement purposes, which is generally deplored.

Educational impact is the central issue for the courts: "one compelling interest has survived judicial scrutiny, namely the educational benefits that allegedly derive from racial diversity." (Zuriff, 2002) In the main section of this critique I discuss a topic not much covered in previous comments on Gurin: the implications of her report, and the policy of race-biased admissions in general, for the nature and educational mission of the university.

I conclude that the scientific evidence for *any* educational effect of diversity experiences that are largely self-chosen, rather than experimentally applied, is weak and contradictory. The effects of race-biased admissions on the nature of America's elite universities cannot be measured with scientific precision. But, insofar as their educational effects can be assessed through experience and historical argument, race-biased admissions seem to have eroded the traditional

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² http://www.nas.org/reports/umich_diversity/umich_execsum.htm
<http://www.umich.edu/%7Eurell/admissions/research/gurin.html>

³ http://www.nas.org/reports/grutter_appeal1/grutter_appeal1_appendix.pdf

⁴ G.E. Zuriff, *Is Racial And Ethnic Diversity Educationally Beneficial?*, *World and I*, 270-87 (August 2002, Vol. 17 No. 8).

and unique mission of the university as a place devoted to the rational and objective discussion and transmission of ideas — in short, the educational effects of race-biased admissions are more likely bad than good.

What is being asserted?

Gurin asserts that increasing the number of black students in a predominantly white university will improve (by her criteria) the after-college behavior of both groups. The improvements she classifies into two categories: “deeper and more complex thinking” and “democracy outcomes.”

The term “complex thinking” is defined by reference to the social psychology literature, but no examples are given.

By “democracy outcomes” Gurin means that “Students educated in diverse settings are better able to participate in our democratic process.” By “better participate” she means “perspective taking, mutuality and reciprocity, acceptance of conflict as a normal part of life, acceptance of difference and capacity to perceive commonality amidst the differences, interest in the wider social world, and citizen participation.”

The effect of race-biased admissions on the (predominantly white) students rejected in favor of black applicants was not studied.

Is it scientifically valid?

Is there a real effect of diversity? Dr. Gurin assessed the effects of racial diversity in college in three different studies by comparing subjective and objective measures from groups of students with varying diversity experiences. But no experiments were done. Gurin did not take groups of white and black individuals, randomly assign them to different college environments and then, years later, assess their situations in life⁵. All she could do was look at statistical associations between different, largely self-chosen, diversity experiences in college and post-college self-reports and responses to questionnaires. Thus, Gurin’s repeated assertions about “direct and strong effects” of racial diversity in college on various post-college measures confuse *statistical association* with *direct causation*. For example, the mean IQ of whites is greater than that of blacks. Does this mean that skin-color differences cause IQ differences? Of course not. There is a statistical association between height and grayness of hair: because children are rarely gray-haired, tall people are more likely to be gray. Does this mean that hair color has an effect on height — or the reverse? Again, of course not. Gurin has found an association between racial diversity in college and various subjective post-college measures. Does this mean the diversity differences caused the post-college differences? No. In most areas of “hard” science, the story would end there: correlation is not causation, hence Gurin’s results represent conjecture, not proof.

In a few places Gurin more accurately reports her results as *associations* (or correlations), but elsewhere refers to her “empirical work” even though she does no experiments. It is clear throughout the document that she is happy to assume that a significant and statistically “controlled” association is tantamount to showing a “direct and strong effect”. This is simply wrong. A statistical association, no matter how “controlled” through multiple regression techniques and the like, can be the source of a causal *hypothesis*; it cannot by itself provide proof of causation.

Of course, associations may be useful even if their causal status is uncertain. If we have nothing else to go on and experiment (which alone can establish true causation) is impossible —

⁵ “What is needed is a direct empirical analysis of learning outcomes and achievement in comparable students...who are randomly assigned to be educated in either more or less diverse settings. Such empirically rigorous analyses are notably absent...” (Williams, 2000, *vide supra*)

yet a decision must be made — a statistical association may be a useful guide. But the conditions under which an association is useful are rather restricted, and even then, there may be legal and moral objections to using mere associations to guide social policy.

For example, *profiling* by race, age and gender can improve the detection of criminal behavior because women, older people, and whites are less likely to commit crimes than young, male and black individuals. The violation of equal treatment by the law entailed by profiling is to some extent justified because the relatively minor cost to innocent suspects — being “stopped” — is outweighed by a substantial increase (typically by a factor of five or more per “stop”) in the number of criminals apprehended.

But *applicant profiling*, giving black applicants extra points in a point-based selection process, can be justified in neither of these ways. The cost to the disadvantaged group — no admission to a prestigious university — is substantial and, as I will argue, the effects of race-based admissions far from being “strong” and beneficial are at best conjectural, at worst damaging to the scholarly mission of the university. If racial profiling is subject to legal restrictions then, by the same criteria, applicant profiling should be outlawed entirely.

How big is the correlation? Gurin presents the results of the three studies in dichotomous form: *significant* or *not significant* (Table 1). But it is important to notice that these statistical results are generally weak, despite the very large samples used⁶. The standard (and much-criticized) significance level in social science is 5%, i.e., a one in twenty chance that the results are accidental. In the “hard” sciences, this would be regarded as much too generous. In a well-controlled experiment, one should be able to get results at the .1 or .01% level at least. None of Gurin’s results even approaches this level. Moreover, in some areas, Gurin settled for an absurdly high level of significance — one in ten — in support of the hypothesis: “Since probability levels are related to sample size, I use a slightly different criterion for the samples of African American and Latino students, the odds of less than 1 in 10 that the relationship was simply due to random chance.” If five percent is too high, ten percent is much too high. No result significant only at the 10% level can be taken seriously.

Gurin’s treatment of her data betrays a serious misunderstanding of the statistical method in relation to public policy. Given a sufficiently large sample, even an exceedingly weak effect may be statistically significant. But it is not significance — is there *any* effect? — but *effect size* — how big an effect is it? — that is important for policy. For example, suppose a new drug for the common cold produces a slight amelioration of symptoms in many people. Given a large enough sample, the small beneficial effect may well be statistically significant. Nevertheless, health policy people might well be reluctant to permit the drug’s use because its positive effect is too small to justify the risk attendant on any new medication.

One such risk is the possibility of negative side effects in a small number of patients. Once a drug is in general use by millions of people, it is always possible it will prove very damaging to a small number of patients. If the drug’s positive effects are small, why take that risk? The same argument should be applied to any change in social policy, such as the violation of equal treatment of all races implicit in race-biased admissions. It can only be justified (if it can ever be justified) by demonstrating large benefits to a race-biased policy, as in the case of racial profiling of criminal suspects. The benefits must be large, not just statistically significant. None

⁶ See Wood & Sherman and Gurin’s response, above.

http://www.nas.org/reports/umich_diversity/umich_execsum.htm. The authors conclude: “the appropriate statistical analyses show that one should reject the claim that campus racial diversity is positively connected with educational benefits.”

of the associations in Gurin's study is large, some are in the wrong direction⁷, and their causal status is uncertain — they may not be *effects* at all.

What is being measured? Gurin describes two kinds of measures: objective measures, such as the racial diversity of living conditions, and subjective measures of things like “complex thinking” and “citizenship engagement.” The subjective measures are based upon self-report and the answers to a variety of questionnaires. Thus, “complex thinking” is not what you or I might mean by that term, any more than the colloquial meaning of “intelligence” corresponds exactly to what is measured on an IQ test. As with IQ, the method is to come up with a set of questions that the researcher believes represent what she means by “complex thinking.” An individual's score on this test then *becomes* “complex thinking” in subsequent discussion. But is it? The problems of validating a measure like this are immense. IQ is still with us because it predicts better than any other single variable how well an individual will do, relative to his cohort, in academic study. No such validation is possible for “complex thinking” or “citizenship engagement.”

Moreover, the supposed desirability of complex thinking represents a simplistic approach to thinking in general. For example, Gurin cites a study by Langer (1978) which “In one of the early studies indicating the pervasiveness of automatic thinking...laid out many positive benefits that come when people can be encouraged to use active, effortful, conscious modes of thought rather than automatic thinking.” But an equally respected psychologist, William James, has pointed out the usefulness of “automatic thinking”, which he termed “habit,” under many conditions. You don't want to think through your typing or your golf swing, for example. It makes no sense to advocate “complex thinking” in general, without taking task and objective into account.

It is perhaps hard to credit this level of naïveté in a respected social scientist, but the tendency to give no weight at all to common experience is unfortunately, and sometimes ludicrously, endemic in social psychology⁸. Gurin's knowledge of intellectual history seems also to be limited. For example, in the section on Learning Outcomes she comments:

Students learn more and think in deeper, more complex ways in a diverse educational environment. A curriculum that deals explicitly with social and cultural diversity, and a learning environment in which diverse students interact frequently with each other, naturally will affect the content of what is learned. Less obvious, however, is the notion that students' *mode of thought* is affected by features of the learning environment, and that diversity is a feature that produces deeper and more complex thinking.

Leave aside for the moment what exactly is meant by deeper and more complex thinking, mode of thought and the like and just ask yourself: Are the groups that have made major intellectual contributions in human history notable for their diversity or their relative homogeneity? If you look at those groups that have been associated with great discoveries in science, for example, you find that far from being diverse, they were rather homogenous. Think for example of the astonishing group of philosophers and scientists in pre-WWII Vienna, the Crick-Watson group at Cambridge, the Bourbaki group of mathematicians in France — not to mention the small and uniform leisured class in ancient Greece. (And of course many significant scientific discoveries have been made not by groups, but by talented individuals — no diversity there.) Much the same is true in the humanities: consider the Bloomsbury Group in England, the “Angry Young Men,” the Harlem Renaissance, even the Beats in the US. Bach, Mozart and Beethoven were

⁷ For example, “There was also evidence that having close friends of the same race was related positively to two learning outcomes for African American students.” And “These findings suggest the supportive function of group identity for African American students.” These data could be used to argue for same-race (i.e., segregated) colleges.

⁸ For example, Gurin writes: “Research in social psychology in the past twenty years, in particular, has shown that active engagement in learning cannot be assumed.” Apparently it took social-science research to tell us that students do not always attend to their lessons.

musical geniuses operating in a relatively uniform tradition: Would they have produced even greater works had they been exposed to Japanese or Chinese music? I doubt it. Much the same might be said of the great renaissance artists. With few exceptions (Picasso?) great art seems to be favored by working within a tradition rather than between traditions.

In sum, a certain amount of *intellectual* diversity is beneficial. But too much diversity seems to be bad and racial diversity (which is what all this is really about) is essentially irrelevant. History provides no support whatever for Gurin's view that the effects of diversity, racial or other, on creative thinking are universally beneficial.

Is there a utilitarian argument for race-biased admissions? Gurin's argument is basically a utilitarian one: race-based college admissions will produce a better (more democratic) society. No effect has been proved by the studies she cites, but let us suppose there is a small but real effect — as in the cold-cure example I gave earlier. What is lacking — and completely undermines any utilitarian argument — is the absence of any information on side effects: How damaging to otherwise eligible non-black applicants — and to society's views of on race and education — was their rejection in favor of relatively unqualified black applicants? We do not know, because neither Gurin nor anyone else has studied these individuals. But without this information, we cannot know even in principle whether a policy of race-based admissions is beneficial to American society in general — as opposed to benefiting just those favored by the policy.

To assess the net benefit or cost of racial preferences in admissions, we also need to know the effect of the policy on the other functions of the university. I look at this in the final section.

What is the effect of current diversity policy on the nature of the American University?

Changes in the idea of a university John Henry Newman in his landmark essay *The Idea of a University* wrote that the university is “a place of teaching universal knowledge... This implies that its object is, on the one hand, intellectual, not moral; and, on the other, that it is the diffusion and extension of knowledge rather than the advancement.” Newman aptly summarized the nature of the university as it had evolved over hundreds of years. Two major changes have taken place since these words were written. The first has been an enormous increase in something that Newman regarded as secondary: the advancement of knowledge. Research now plays an influential role in the budgets of our major universities and monopolizes the energies of most of its tenure-track faculty⁹. This change dates from the post-WWII era, when science began to be seen as “the endless frontier.” It was further enhanced by the cold war and various other “wars” — on cancer, AIDS, mental illness and similar scourges — wars in which the advancement of knowledge was seen as a weapon.

The second change is directly contradictory to the traditional idea of the university as a place “of universal knowledge... intellectual not moral.” In the last two or three decades, the educational function of the university is increasingly seen in *moral* rather than purely intellectual terms: “American universities have achieved their international prominence precisely because they have, until now, recognized the value of free inquiry, open expression, and discovery that is

⁹ Because promotion and tenure depends primarily on research output. One side effect of the funds brought in by research grants and the importance of research to advancement along the tenure track, is that an increasing amount of teaching in “research universities” is done by non-tenure-track adjunct faculty who have little influence on major educational decisions about curriculum, grading policies and the like. The sidelining of teaching is a current topic of concern to educators.

driven ...by broader social ends" (Scott, 2002¹⁰, my emphases) In other words, we search for truth not for its own sake, but for "broader social ends." "You come for an education for a purpose: to prepare you to be a better citizen...but fundamentally, a better...person." (Duke University President Nannerl Keohane, Convocation Address, 1997) "Wellesley College emphasizes women's development, academic excellence, and multi-cultural sensitivity." (From the Wellesley web site, 1997) The University of Michigan mission statement is closer to the traditional one, however — though broad enough to allow wide interpretation:

The mission of the University of Michigan is to serve the people of Michigan and the world through preeminence in creating, communicating, preserving and applying knowledge, art, and academic values, and in developing leaders and citizens who will challenge the present and enrich the future. (From the University of Michigan web site, December, 2002)

The only "values" referred to are still academic ones, but the reference to "developing leaders" might allow for Gurin's emphasis on "personal identity" and the need for students to "feel authentic."

Nevertheless, overall the mission of America's elite universities has been shifting from the intellectual (cognitive, as it might now be termed) and impersonal (objective) to the moral (multicultural sensitivity) and personal (a better person). Underlying this change is the idea that moral understanding, like scientific understanding, is progressive¹¹. Gurin's frequent references to an "advanced stage of moral reasoning" and "cognitive and emotional processes that promote...advanced morality" betray her confidence that the morality of liberal academics is better than all that has preceded it. There is surely room to question this belief — or at least to ask that it be explicitly defended. It is not obvious (for example) that the morality of the 18th century, the century of the Founding Fathers, of Dr. Johnson and Jane Austin, is inferior to the morality of today, the morality of Washington, of Norman Mailer and Danielle Steel. Not everyone will accept either that morality is like science, that it has progressed, or even that it can progress. Yet Dr. Gurin, along with many other social scientists, accepts the reality of moral progress without question. What is much, much worse, she bases her educational philosophy on this belief.

The idea of the university as an impersonal place devoted to truth and the life of the mind, taking no note of individual differences other than intellectual ones, is slowly being transformed into what some have termed the *therapeutic model*. (A less charitable characterization would say that outside the natural sciences, *education* is being replaced by *indoctrination*.) The focus is increasingly on the psychological development of the individual student and his or her attitudes towards others and towards social issues, particularly issues of race, class and gender.

The therapeutic university and erosion of traditional beliefs Dr. Gurin is comfortable with this trend and wishes to advance it. She cites noted (but now largely discredited) Freudian psychologist Erik Erikson's notion of *personal identity* in support of a model of the university as a kind of antidote to the family. According to this model, the university should "involve confrontation with diversity and complexity, lest young people passively make commitments that follow their past, rather than being obliged to think and make decisions that fit their talents and feel authentic." In other words, Gurin views it as an obligation of the university to challenge the ideas and moral values that students bring with them from their home environments. A more direct opposition to the traditional idea of the university as a place where stu-

¹⁰ Joan Wallach Scott is Harold F. Linder Professor of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study and chair of the AAUP's Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure. This quote appeared in the AAUP Journal *Academe*, in the summer of 2002.

¹¹ Unquestioning belief in not only the existence but also the inevitability of moral progress can be found in a wide range of recent books on political matters, from psychology through sociology even to economics: see, for example, *The myth of ownership*, by Murphy and Nagel (2002) who at least concede that "Progress in moral thinking is slow...."

dents learn “the best that has been thought and known in the world” (in Matthew Arnold’s famous words) can hardly be imagined.

Of course intellectual challenge is part of a liberal education. Students need to understand everything important that has been written about a controversial topic, whether it agrees with their current beliefs or not. But Gurin evidently means more than this. For her, the beliefs that students bring from home are probably wrong, hence should not be supported by the college environment: “Going to college in one’s home environment or replicating the home community’s social life and expectations in a homogeneous college that is simply an extension of the home community impedes the personal struggle and consciousness of thought that Erikson argues are critical for identity development.”

Gurin notes the progress that has already been made:

Historically, dramatic changes in higher education followed the enrollment of women and racially/ethnically diverse students. The increases in diverse student enrollments that have occurred as a result of affirmative action and other factors have resulted in pressures for institutional transformation of the academic and social life at colleges across the country.

One dimension of this institutional transformation is **classroom diversity**, or the incorporation of knowledge about diverse groups into the curriculum that colleges and universities present to this more diverse array of students. This has largely been the result of the recruitment of more faculty who include content and research on different groups in college coursework (Chang, 1996). Other examples of curricular change are the development of ethnic studies and women’s studies programs, co-curricular academic support programs, and multicultural programming (Trevino, 1992; Munoz, 1989; Peterson et al, 1978). The positive learning and democracy outcomes empirically linked to these rich curricular offerings and multicultural occur in the context of structural diversity.

Gurin argues that changes in the gender mix (although these have been relatively small for the past several decades, and women in fact now outnumber men in admissions to most colleges) have led to changes in the curriculum — additions like women’s studies, academic support programs, multicultural programming and the like. She claims that similar changes will follow on increases in the number of (racial) minority students: new programs in ethnic studies, African-American studies and so forth. She believes that these changes are good: “a curriculum that deals explicitly with social and cultural diversity, and interaction with diverse peers produce a learning environment that fosters conscious, effortful, deep thinking.”

How valid is this claim?

Deep thinking? A substantial literature¹² has arisen on the topic of the new courses and programs that Gurin believes favor “deep thinking.” Outside the fields themselves, there is less agreement. Many, perhaps even a majority, feel that far from promoting profundity, most of these new courses are extremely superficial. Courses in women’s studies, for example, are more often like indoctrination or cheer-leading group-therapy sessions than rigorous examinations of literature from a variety of perspectives. Indeed, why else would one need a separate department to study writing by women? — no such separation has been found necessary in the sciences. The work of Barbara McClintock or Lynn Margulis is covered in standard biology courses; there is no separate “women’s science” department. Women’s science is judged in precisely the same way as men’s science, and by the same people. The main achievement of women’s studies programs has in fact been to insulate much of the work from legitimate criticism. Very few men participate in these programs, either as teachers or students. Indeed, in a few documented cases, men have actually been prevented from taking specific women’s studies courses. Far from pro-

¹² A small sample: G. Marsden *The soul of the American university*. Oxford University Press, 1994; *Tenured radicals: How politics has corrupted our higher education*. Roger Kimball, 1998, Elephant Pb. Chicago. Dinesh D’Souza *Illiberal education: The politics of race and sex on campus*. 1998, Pb, *The shadow university: The betrayal of liberty on America’s campuses*. H. Silverglate & A. Kors (New York: Free Press, 1998)

moting “deep thinking”, all too often these courses simply require the parroting of buzzwords and acquiescence in a particular feminist ideology.

The case for African-American studies is stronger. There is a unique African-American history, which has produced its own art, music and literature. But even so, one would like to hear coherent arguments for why Afro-American history should not be part of the history curriculum or Afro-American art part of the art history curriculum (as it is at my own university), and so on. But such arguments are notable by their absence. The case that is usually made (by African Americans, but also increasingly by other “students of color”) is largely a misplaced democratic one: we are here, why can’t we have our own department? This is the process that Gurin refers to — with evident approval — when she writes: “The increases in diverse student enrollments that have occurred as a result of affirmative action and other factors have resulted in pressures for institutional transformation of the academic and social life at colleges across the country.”

What she fails to note is that these “pressures for institutional transformation” are usually unashamedly political, rather than scholarly, and thus inevitably degrade the intellectual mission of the university. The danger is that by being isolated, the new “discipline” slides into self-congratulation and group cheerleading; criticism degenerates from being scholarly to being largely ideological.

Ghetto courses and racial stereotyping There is also another and in some ways more sinister problem with Gurin’s “multicultural programming.” A recent example is from Colgate University:

The uproar began when Barry Shain, a tenured white political scientist at Colgate, wrote in an e-mail message to a female black student that minority students were often seduced into unchallenging courses where liberal professors, who were “sensitive” to their needs, gave them inflated grades. That practice, Shain continued, harmed black students, who were generally less well prepared academically than their white peers. He further complained that a growing number of courses encouraged students to examine their feelings as a way to explore racial issues. (From *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Sept. 13, 2002)

The author of the article, Phillip Richards, goes on to note that “few, if any, Colgate faculty members had stood up to contest Shain’s assertion that black students were less well prepared and educated than their white counterparts. The most thoughtful black students remarked, however, that Shain had simply aired a long-hidden truth about life at the college...” The fact is that at all but the very best universities (which can attract the very best minority students) “affirmative action” admits on average do not perform as well as regular admits. (Confronting majority students with a low-performing population of minority students of course reinforces, rather than weakens, familiar racist stereotypes — another baleful side-effect of race-biased admissions policies.) One solution to this self-made problem is the one identified by Shain, create a sort of ghetto of unchallenging multicultural courses that will allow these students to get acceptable grades — while depriving them of a real education. All too often this is the real reason for “a curriculum that deals explicitly with social and cultural diversity.”

On education Gurin writes (and the Founding Fathers would agree): “Democracy is predicated on an educated citizenry.” True, but what is *education*? And what should be the attitude of the university to democracy, which is after all, only one of many forms of political organization? Gurin, like most of my students, accepts democracy as an unqualified good. It has become a kind of religion among otherwise irreligious social scientists. Yet there are many places where it is inappropriate — science, for example, where nature is the arbiter, not a head count. And there are of course many forms of democracy and many forms of voting. Gurin discusses the views of Aristotle and Plato on the kind of polity needed for an effective democracy. She plumps for a version of Aristotle that I barely recognize and dismisses the exclusions he as-

sumed: “What makes democracy work, according to Aristotle, is equality among citizens who are peers (admittedly only free men at the time, not women and not slaves).”

But these are not trivial exclusions. The efficacy of Greek and US “democracy” may have had something to do with the fact they were (at least initially, in the US case) confined to an elite. The point is not to advocate limited democracy, but to emphasize that the proper form of government is a hugely complicated issue that cannot be taken as settled. And in any case, it is not the business of the university to support one style of government versus another. We should help students to understand different types of government, their history and their consequences. We should not be in the business of cheerleading for one or the other, any more than we should use the classroom to advocate our own political views. Dr. Gurin’s discussion — arguing against Jefferson and the Founding Fathers¹³ and in favor of some ill-specified and untried multiculturalism — goes well beyond science and the qualifications of Dr. Gurin. “Democracy,” as Gurin uses it, is a religious tenet, not the proper aim of a real university. To train students for democracy in the way she proposes is more like indoctrination than real education.

The only legitimate ideal for a real university is, as Newman, Arnold and countless others have pointed out, a belief in *truth* and a willingness to look as objectively as possible at any new idea¹⁴. Race-biased admissions and hiring policies, and the train of curricular and value changes that they are bringing along with them, are eroding this ideal. Their net effect on the university is not good, as Gurin and other supporters of affirmative action claim: it is *bad*.

What is liberal education? Its ingredients are reason, a belief in truth, in the importance of facts and ideas. The effect of such an education, we hope, is to create an individual better able to contribute to society — as worker, as citizen and as a participant in the political process. But no fixed set of beliefs — other than in truth and the importance of knowledge and reason — is prescribed. The student must judge for himself about his position on difficult issues. The very opposite of liberal education is *indoctrination*, which is aimed not at the disinterested examination of “the best that has been thought and said” but at a fixed objective: the acquisition by the student of a prescribed set of beliefs.

The evidence shows that advocates of race-based university admissions are changing the educational process away from liberality towards something not easily distinguishable from indoctrination. Dr. Gurin’s testimony shows this particularly clearly. For example,

Students who experienced diversity in classroom settings...were...the most likely to acknowledge that group differences are compatible with the interests of the broader community.

But *are* group differences “compatible with the interests of the broader community”? Well, sometimes, but as countless enduring racial, religious and ethnic conflicts around the world attest, sometimes not. To urge students towards one side of this debate is an expression of hope

¹³ “The theory of democracy that has prevailed in the United States is more akin to Plato’s than to Aristotle’s conception. It is the Republican tradition, represented by Rousseau on through Jefferson, in which democracy and citizenship are believed to require social homogeneity, simplicity, and an overarching common identity, rather than social diversity, complexity, and multiple identities. The model is the town meeting where people from similar backgrounds, familiar with each other, and interdependent through similarity and familiarity, come together to debate the common good. The increasingly heterogeneous population in the United States challenges this conception of democracy...” Gurin Report.

¹⁴ Postmodernists have of course argued against the idea of truth, but as many have pointed out, their argument is a self-canceling one that would make any serious intellectual inquiry impossible. “Truth has survived millenia of liars. But universities confer, on just a few individuals in each generation, the time, privilege and resources to appreciate abstractions like The Truth. When this elite defects and adopts strange, myopic creeds, it weakens the covenant of civilization...It’s the idea [of truth] that matters. It matters as much as the idea of God, and is probably inseparable from it.” (onetime *Time* pundit Hal Crowther)

not a communication of fact. It is not education, but indoctrination. I am afraid the same can be said of most of the so-called scientific arguments in favor of race-biased college admissions.

Opponents of affirmative action are sometimes stymied by the question “Well, surely you are in favor of diversity, aren’t you?” The problem is that racial diversity is not the same as intellectual diversity¹⁵. All agree that some measure of intellectual diversity is essential to any creative endeavor. But I believe that the race-biased policies that are supposed to bring about racial diversity have produced changes in teaching and curriculum that tend to reduce intellectual diversity. They produce not diversity, but conformity: belief in the inevitability of moral progress, in the superiority of current views to earlier views, in the ethos aptly named by the students themselves as “political correctness.”

CONCLUSION

The expert reports of Dr. Gurin and her colleagues were evidently effective in persuading the appellate court to overturn the lower court’s rejection of the University of Michigan’s affirmative action policy in the *Gratz, et al. v. Bollinger, et al.* and *Grutter, et al. v. Bollinger, et al.* cases. The weight of “expert” opinion in these cases was indeed overwhelming, with the *coup de grace* being delivered by *The shape of the river* (1998), a book written by two of the most prestigious figures in the American academy, Derek Bok and William Bowen, ex-presidents of Harvard and Princeton, respectively. But I believe a careful examination even of this volume will reveal much the same story as my comments on the expert testimony of Dr. Gurin: correlation not causation, no attention to those disadvantaged by the policy, distortions of the curriculum and standards of teaching, and unquestioning faith in a particular solution to America’s racial problems.

“Social scientists are suckers for data, hard numbers they can crunch and graph¹⁶.” David Brooks was criticizing the CIA, but his words are equally applicable to the diversity issue. Social scientists like Dr. Gurin seem unwilling to acknowledge that measuring with scientific precision the effects of affirmative action, in all their ramifications — on both favored and excluded individuals, on the nature of the academy, and on society at large — is essentially impossible. Gurin’s report, one of the most focused, fails even to establish large correlations, much less large causal effects of affirmative action. And these small associations are sometimes in the wrong direction. The effects on university education in general of the kind of self-conscious diversity represented by the policies of the University of Michigan, I have argued, are in fact generally quite bad. The overweening desire of many academics to impose on society what they believe to be an effective solution to current racial problems has eroded liberal education. Too many multicultural courses have crossed over the line dividing liberal education from ideological indoctrination. Race-biased admissions policies are morally questionable and pragmatically ineffective — even dangerous to the true ideals of a university. I believe they should be abolished. At the very least, the law should give them no encouragement.

¹⁵ There is a necessary opposition between hiring “the best” (on intellectual grounds) physicist or historian vs. the best “black” or “female” physicist. See for example a recent letter from Staddon to *The Duke Chronicle*: http://www.chronicle.duke.edu/vnews/display.v/ART/2002/11/11/3dcfabfb154de?in_archive=1

¹⁶ Social commentator David Brooks, in the January/February (2003) *The Atlantic Monthly*