

opinion

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THEBUZZ
Questions asked to you, our readers.

What did you do over the summer?



"Went to Spain and Ireland."
- Norah Burke



"Officer things for PTK, hosted Violet, went hiking, took lots of photos."
- Bridgett Moss



"Internship in Door County. Worked at the front desk of a hotel."
- Morgan Witthun

Impact of affirmative action ruling

Ruling could increase the admissions advantage of the wealthy and powerful

CLAIRE LIDDICOAT
Staff Writer

Within the hallowed halls of justice, where words carry the weight of a nation's conscience, the United States Supreme Court has once again cut to the core of a contentious and consequential issue that has long divided the country. The Court's holding that Universities may not use an applicant's race as a "plus factor" in admissions has sparked impassioned and divisive discussions across the states. It is important to know the collateral damage as our secondary education system adopts the precedent set last June.

Two cases filed by Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. (SFFA) were brought before the Supreme Court challenging the impact of the factor of race in college admissions. In a six to three decision, the Court struck down affirmative action programs at Harvard University and the University of North Carolina, stating that they violate the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This effectively bans race-based admissions programs in 4-year universities across the United States

The impact of this decision has been widespread, and changes within admission systems across the country will begin rapidly. Race-based programs that have been in use for decades are not to be used by any university admission system. New systems will have to be put in place by admissions offices to ensure that they can fulfill their commitment to a diverse student body and then hope that those methods stay out of the scrutiny of the Supreme Court.

The first group who will suffer the impacts of the ruling will be early-decision applicants for the Class of 2028. Until then, no other applicants will be



ANNA MONEYMAKER / GETTY IMAGES / TNS

Supporters of affirmative action protest near the U.S. Supreme Court Building on Capitol Hill on June 29, in Washington, DC. In a 6-3 vote, Supreme Court Justices ruled that race-conscious admissions programs at Harvard and the University of North Carolina are unconstitutional, setting precedent for affirmative action in other universities and colleges.

affected, but a decision like this has already shown how detrimental it can be to diversity in states like Michigan and California. Affirmative action has already been banned by voters in 1996 and 2006.

The public university systems of both states filed briefs to the Supreme Court in the rise of SFFA v. Harvard, disputing the arguments that SFFA made for race-neutral alternatives to affirmative action. SFFA used Michigan and California as examples of success stories with the ban on race-conscious admissions systems. Both university systems have seen decreases in diversity in their student bodies since the ban.

In the brief that the University of California school system (UC) submitted to the Court, UC stated that, "After Proposition 209 barred consideration of race in admissions decisions at public universities in California, freshmen enrollees from underrepresented minority groups dropped precipitously at UC and dropped by 50% or more at UC's most selective campuses."

Even with many widespread efforts to increase diversity of all sorts, UC still struggles to enroll a sufficiently diverse student body. This is especially apparent at the most selective campuses, where there is a widespread feeling amongst African American,

Native American and Latinx students of underrepresentation and racial isolation.

Even if the struggle for diversity is the most prominent in highly competitive schools and only affects a small percentage of people who attend elite universities, it does not make the impact any less consequential. Diplomas from these universities are incomparable invitations into positions of wealth and power. Politicians and government leaders are disproportionately from elite schools, as well as leaders in media, technology and financial

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CLARION STAFF PHOTO

A customer looks over options in the Truax Campus Atrium Café.

Plentiful choices at the Atrium Café

VALERIE UTASKI
Staff Writer

There are plentiful meal choices available at the Atrium Café on the Truax Campus to support your health and wellbeing.

The Café offers a large breakfast menu. Egg platters, breakfast burritos or English muffins are just some of the many choices. If you're in a hurry, you'll find an assortment of grab'n'go items like yogurts, donuts, scones and more. Coffee, juice, milk, and my favorite choice - water - are all available.

Lunch service begins at 11 a.m., with a made-to-order Panini station (half or whole options), a beautiful fresh salad bar and the grill.

There are many seating areas around the café to enjoy your meal and plenty of ways to interact with the staff. My daughter loves asking David to make her favorite turkey wrap and a rainbow salad at the Panini station, giving her a substantial K-cal energy boost for the day. Joan sees us for breakfast and greets us with a smile every time.

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RULING

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spaces. Eight of nine current Supreme Court Justices of Harvard and Yale graduates.

The link between elite universities and positions of authority cannot be ignored and will ultimately lead to less diversity and representation among influential individuals throughout the United States. This is why race-neutral programs that can accomplish the same goals as affirmative action must be put in place so that as our communities grow and become more diverse, our universities follow suit.

An aspect that remains untouched, however, is the admissions systems that specifically include athlete recruitment and legacy students, whose admission is not solely based on extracurriculars, GPAs, or test scores, but on who their parents are and how much time and money they could dedicate to a sport. Legacy admissions directly benefit many white students, who often have a family line of graduates from a university, originating from a time when people of color were not allowed to use the same bathrooms, let alone learn in the same classrooms as white students.

Regarding athletic-based admissions, those who are recruited to play college athletics are usually those who had the time, money, and resources to play a sport at a high enough level to achieve attention from college recruiters.

In an essay from the UCLA Law Review, they found that across six Ivy League universities, 71% of freshman student-athletes were white (Jayakumar et al., 2023).

This shows that white student-athletes are more likely to have the ability to pursue athletics at a higher level because they more often than not possess the things necessary for them to succeed both in their sport and academically.

Both legacy and athletic-based systems have remained untouched, however, and continue to take up admissions spots, scholarship money and financial aid.

While this decision in many ways was a step back in time to an admission system that excluded people of color from spaces for higher education, knowledge and growth, all hope is not lost in the admission system. Thankfully, many admission offices have been anticipating this decision for a few years, so many already have plans in place, while still complying with the ban, to proactively prevent the regression of diversity at universities. Time will tell with the application and enforcement of this ban, but for now, the struggle continues for reaching a diverse and equitable America.

CHOICES

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While there, check out Rocha's Taqueria, where you can build your own tacos and burritos. The staff members are eager to answer your questions. The cashiers are especially helpful when the chefs are busy.

The Atrium Café offers choices for people with food allergies. It has gluten-free options, vegan alternatives and nutritional information.

The Atrium Café is open at 7:30 a.m. and the Coffee Shop at 7 a.m. They both close at 4 p.m. Monday through Thursday and at 2 p.m. on Fridays.

If you want to stay within budget, start loading money onto your OneCard by visiting onecard.madisoncollege.edu or asking at Student Life, where you can save 10 percent on all cafeteria purchases.

The food is affordable and I do not have to worry about how to feed myself and my daughter when the meetings get stacked with class time – and let's not forget the reward of a tasty hazelnut latte at the Coffee Shop right next door.

I can't think of a better way to start my day.

THE COST OF EDUCATION



PHOTO PROVIDED TO THE CLARION

Students pose with Department of Education Officials at the SSTAR Lab. Pictured are, front row, from left: Mercedes Hernandez-Natera, Sinetra Wilson and Kai Brito; back row, from left, Deputy Secretary Cindy Marten, Sheng Ying Vang, Kate Westaby, Casey Konkol, Under Secretary James Kvaal, Lai'Kita Buie, Kris Flugum.

Affordability is key to dream of college

Interest-free student loans would be a great start

KAI BRITO
Staff Writer

From the cost of tuition to the daily cost of living, college students are struggling to find ways to make higher education work amidst the backdrop of our current economic reality. This is true particularly for community college students, where affordability is a chief concern for making the college dream possible.

That is why U.S. Under Secretary of Education James Kvaal and Deputy Secretary of Education Cindy Marten invited a delegation of students from Madison College, Edgewood College and UW-Madison to share stories of our experiences paying for college and receiving financial aid.

I was one of five students invited from Madison College to the Student Success Through Applied Research Lab for a roundtable discussion. We used this opportunity to advocate for the expansion of financial aid funds and other benefits programs. Overall, our concerns fell into two categories: Affordability and Accessibility.

Every year in March, the Wisconsin Technical College System sets the tuition rates for all 16 technical colleges for the following year. Historically, those meetings result in a tuition increase, with 1.72% being the average rate of increase over the past five years (2019-2023).

While those increases are fairly modest and below the pace of inflation, the increases are contextualized by the state of the economy. Students feel the burden of perpetually rising tuition rates in tandem with an increased cost of necessities like rent hikes, climbing gas rates, and the seemingly never-ending spike in food prices.

In our conversation, my proposal was to go back to the roots of the college conversation and champion the Free College for All Act. In 2021, as part of his American Families Plan, President Joe Biden pitched two years of free community college, providing tuition-free enrollment and funding

for teachers and teacher-training.

And while I personally believe in that ideal, I also recognize that it is not feasible in our current political and economic climate. Back in June, the Supreme Court struck down President Biden's student loan forgiveness plan in a six to three ruling, ending the hopes of millions of Americans as student loan payments restart in October.

But a simpler proposal to help alleviate the college burden would be to implement zero percent interest student loans. Recently in August, Representative Joe Courtney and other congressional democrats introduced the Student Loan Interest Elimination Act which would refinance the interest rate of all existing Federal student loans to zero percent and cap the maximum interest rate at four percent for all new Federal student loans.

And this bill is just one of many attempts to address the ballooning price tag for student loan interest. Back in 2019, and again in 2021, Florida Senator Marco Rubio introduced the Leveraging Opportunities for Americans Now Act which would cut the interest rate on federal student loans. With some bipartisan support signaled from across the aisle, suddenly student debt relief does not seem so impossible.

The other students in our group focused on access to student financing options. Part of the problem with financial aid is that students do not have the knowledge or awareness to be able to access funds that they are qualified to receive.

When I first started attending Madison College, my goal was to obtain a professional certification as a Certified Fraud Examiner through the Forensic Accounting & Internal Auditing Certificate. It was not until speaking to an advisor about career prospects and sharing my person-

al story that I learned I qualify for WorkSmart, a program for unemployed and displaced workers. The only reason I can pursue an associate degree is because of the support provided from this program, which I did not know about until after I was already in school for one term.

In addition to lack of knowledge or communication of these programs, sometimes benefits programs work against each other with eligibility requirements.

For instance, to receive SNAP Benefits, half- and full-time students must either be working at least 20 hours a week in paid employment, take care of a child, be in a work study or on-the-job training program, or meet some other specific requirements. These limitations prohibit students from accessing need-based assistance programs, but the reality is that these services would help the average student.

At Madison College, the average age for a student is 29 years old. The reality is that the average student attending school is not a well-off recent high school graduate whose parents are footing the bill. Students can be single working parents, formerly incarcerated individuals, laid off seasonal workers, GED/HSED seekers, or anyone who is returning to school to advance their career.

The bottom line is that we need to increase financial aid options for an expanding definition of "the average student" attending two-year technical colleges.

Because many students, including myself, believe that graduating from Madison College would change our lives for the better. So, my request to the Department of Education is to fund students that are seeking to invest in themselves, starting with community colleges.

The bottom line is that we need to increase financial aid options for an expanding definition of "the average student" attending two-year technical colleges.