

CHAPTER 13

Appreciating Our Differences

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For years, the United States prided itself on being one nation united by a common culture. Subcultures (Hispanic, African-American, Asian-American, and others) were encouraged to shed much of their cultural identities and become part of the whole.

Then, in the wake of the civil rights movement of the sixties, this concept of a “melting pot” vanished, replaced by an ideal called “diversity,” where different ethnic groups, instead of melding into one another to produce an “American ethnicity,” would celebrate their own cultures as well as the general culture.

Many view diversity as a more tolerant ideal than the melting pot, claiming it allows people to preserve their identities instead of forcing them into assimilation. Others argue that “diversity” encourages the belief that culture is genetically transmitted and racially specific. All of this is perhaps an oversimplification of what diversity actually stands for. As a new college student, you should understand that individuals belonging to various cultural, ethnic, and racial groups share common traits not only with others of their particular group, but also with others beyond their group.

What did you learn about people who were different from you when you were growing up? How might college help change your attitudes toward people of other races, ethnicities, and cultures?

IN THIS CHAPTER, YOU WILL LEARN

- How diversity in America has changed and is changing
- Why it isn't easy to label an individual as a member of a certain cultural group
- The value of sharing your uniqueness with others
- What colleges are doing to promote healthy diversity
- How to fight discrimination and prejudice on campus
- How the “old minority” is becoming the “new majority”

Race, Ethnic Groups, and Culture

The word *race* generally refers to a group of people who are distinct from other people in terms of certain inherited characteristics: skin color, hair color, hair texture, body build, and facial features. *Ethnic group* can refer to people of different races or to people of the same race who can be distinguished by language, national origin, religious tradition, and so on.

Culture refers to the material and nonmaterial products that people in a society create or acquire from other societies and pass on to future generations. Culture includes a society's beliefs, values, norms, and language. For example, many European societies believe children should learn to be independent and self-sufficient at an early age, whereas Hispanic cultures tend to place a high value on strong family ties. As people from different ethnic groups marry one another and have children, the word *race* is slowly becoming insufficient as a descriptor of individuals with mixed heritages, and many such people are refusing to fill in the line asking for "race" on numerous government and business forms, especially when their only choices are white, black, Asian, Hispanic, and the ubiquitous "other."

The Changing U.S. Population

When the Census Bureau completed its count of the American population in April 2000, we learned that the United States had 281 million people within its 50 states and territories. During the 20th century, the number of Americans had increased by more than 200 million people, a phenomenal and unprecedented rate of change.

When the latest figures were revealed, the director of the Census Bureau, Kenneth Prewitt, stated that not only was the United States a dynamic nation in terms of population growth, it was the only nation in the world where virtually every group represented had its origins in another country. Seldom before had we thought about the diverse origins of the American population as we did in the last portion of the 20th century.

You undoubtedly will encounter this diversity during college, and most definitely in your postcollegiate life. Social change over the past 100 years has changed the face of America, and the results of these changes will become increasingly apparent in the early part of the new century.

In a 10-year study of college student success, Harvard University Professor Richard J. Light found that an overwhelming majority of his students reported that the impact of racial and ethnic diversity on learning was both strong and

positive.¹ Such experiences are occurring among college students from all types of institutions. In a letter to his teacher at a university in Iowa, where racial minorities are a very small percentage of the population, a recent white college graduate who is now a corporate executive wrote, “A day doesn’t go by that I don’t use something I learned from African-American Studies.”

A Century of Change

Figures from the 2000 Census show that the United States has greater racial diversity, greater ethnic diversity, and more foreign-born residents than ever before. Women play a much greater role in every aspect of American life. And emerging lifestyles make it imperative that students become more sensitive to and knowledgeable about others as well as themselves.

Race and ethnicity are much more complex ideas than commonly assumed. In counting the American population in 2000, the Census Bureau used five categories of race, plus two additional categories for people of “some other race” or “two or more races” (see Table 13.1).

People from Hispanic or Latino backgrounds are not considered a race, but an ethnic group. The Census Bureau reports that more than 35 million Americans (12.5% of the total) identify themselves as Hispanic. If we add these numbers to those of other minorities, we can see that racial and ethnic minorities together represent more than one-third of the U.S. population at the beginning of the 21st century.

While little changed in the first half of the 20th century, the second half was a different matter. Not only racial distribution changed but the definitions

Table 13.1 Total U.S. Population, 2000, by Race

White	75.1%
Black or African-American	12.3
American Indian/Alaska Native	0.9
Asian	3.6
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.1
Some other race	5.5
Two or more races	2.4

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of the Census, “Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin: 2000,” *Census 2000 Brief*, C2KBR/01-1, March 2001, by Elizabeth M. Grieco and Rachel C. Cassidy.

¹ Richard J. Light, *Making the Most of College: Students Speak Their Minds* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp. 9–10, and chapters 7, 8.

of race also changed. The American Anthropological Association reports that since 1900, more than 30 different racial terms have been used to identify populations in the U.S. Census. Regardless of definitions, however, it is clear that the United States is more racially diverse than ever before, and this diversity is apparent at many colleges and universities.

Another aspect of present-day American diversity is the changing distribution of country of origin. In 1900, 13 percent of all Americans were foreign born. This percentage declined to 7 percent by 1950, and grew to 8 percent by 1990. What is significant, however, is the dramatic change in the places from which these new Americans came. By the end of the 20th century, more than 26 million persons of foreign birth were living in the United States, many of them as naturalized citizens. In 1999, 50.7 percent of all foreign-born residents were from Latin America, most of them from Mexico or Central America. Another 27.1 percent were born in Asia, and 15.1 percent were born in Europe. The remaining 6.2 percent were born in other areas of the world.²

In the past, racial differentiation was often viewed in terms of whites and blacks (see Table 13.2). Blacks are still a major racial group in America, but they have been increasingly joined by Asians, American Indians, and Alaska Natives. What's more, definitions of race are expanding so that Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders are now counted as a separate race.³

Recently, the Census Bureau acknowledged that a growing number of Americans are of more than one race. In the 2000 census, more than 6 million people described themselves as multiracial. Although most indicated they were of two races, some indicated as many as five races. It's harder now than ever before to categorize any individual.

Besides race and country of origin, a third dimension of American diversity is ethnicity. As we said earlier, an ethnic group is defined by cultural characteristics that are voluntary, such as language, lifestyle, cuisine, or other

Table 13.2 Trends in U.S. Population by Race

TIME	POPULATION	WHITE	BLACK	OTHER
1900	76 million	87.9%	11.6%	0.5%
1950	151 million	89.5%	10.0%	0.5%
2000	291 million	75.1%	12.3%	*see below

* American Indian/Alaska Native, 0.9; Asian, 3.6; Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 0.1, some other race, 5.5; two or more races, 2.4.
Source: Census Bureau.

² U.S. Bureau of the Census, "PPL-123, Profile of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States: March 1999," issued August 2000.

³ U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Overview of Race and Hispanic Origin," *Census 2000 Brief*, issued March 2001.

patterns of social organization. Race and ethnicity intersect in various ways. In the 2000 census, for example, nearly half (48%) of all Latinos indicated their race as white. Others described themselves as black or American Indian, and many indicated that they represented two or more races.

Can you understand why the concept of “race” is becoming less and less distinct today?

The Many Dimensions of Diversity

Even though we may think race and ethnicity are clearly distinct concepts, such is not the case. In fact, race and ethnicity are basically social concepts we use to categorize and define people according to their physical appearance or the way they act or sound. *No reputable social scientist would ever assert there is any biological or scientific foundation for the idea of race.*

In a discussion of their decision to expand the racial categories in the 2000 enumeration, the Census Bureau cited “changing lifestyles and emerging sensitivities” among the people of the United States as reasons for the revised categories.

In one class in a large university, the instructor assumed that students who looked Asian would consent to being considered Asian, yet three students objected very strongly to being so categorized. One student wrote that he was *not* Asian, he was Vietnamese. Another wrote that she was Filipino. Still a third wrote, “I am of the Hawaiian race.” Students who were referred to as Hispanic or Latino had similar reactions. Some asserted that they not only were Puerto Rican, they were not a minority. In their homes, they were the majority group. Enrollment in a large mainland university led to their being categorized in a number of ways that they rejected.

Another example of the intersection and interaction of race, ethnicity, and national origin can be seen in a *New York Times* series on race in America.⁴ Two young men, born in Cuba and growing up as good friends, emigrated separately to the United States and settled in Miami. As Latinos of Cuban birth, they shared a common origin and ethnicity. They shared a common language. But once in the United States, they found they were considered two different races. As a result, it became difficult to maintain their childhood friendship, and they ultimately grew apart. One man was white, the other black.

This last example shows that the *concept* of race is still powerful in the United States. The consequence is that physical appearance—including skin complexion, hair texture, and eye shape—is an important part of our categorization of others and ourselves.

⁴ Correspondents of *The New York Times*, *How Race Is Lived in America: Pulling Together, Pulling Apart* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001).

The Concept of Race on Campus

As you observe your campus environment, you will see clear evidence of the significance of race in the way students interact with one another and how they view others as well as themselves. This is a particularly intense experience for black or African-American students. Such groups as the Black Student Alliance (Union) as well as black fraternities and sororities are crucial to the participation and success of black students in predominantly white institutions. Although black students rarely seek to isolate themselves from the larger campus community, they are seldom welcomed into the campus community based on their individual merits and special qualities. Instead, they are often seen and perceived as black, with little understanding of who they really are. Whenever someone asks, "Why do all the black students sit together in the cafeteria?" you might do well to ask if they have ever noticed that all the white students also sit together. Transcending the boundaries of race in college will require that all students become extremely sensitive to one another and aware of how race affects perceptions, understandings, and experiences.

To a profound degree, ideas of race affect how students perceive themselves and how they perceive others, and may well affect the opportunities for shared activities. What's more, as we have seen, ideas of race are changing even though fundamental notions of race persist. College is the one place where many of these concepts and their related structures can be bridged if students can find common ground for interaction and cooperation.

What Does the Future Hold for You, for Me, for Us?

In considering diversity and the American future, the past provides some indication of what may happen. At the start of the 20th century, European Americans represented 88 percent of the total population. By the beginning of the 21st century, that number had dropped to 75 percent. Regardless of where, diversity is becoming more and more an everyday experience in society.

The dynamic and rapid nature of this change is apparent when we realize that in 1996 the Census Bureau projected that the minority population would not reach one-third of the total until the year 2020. This proportion has been reached more than 20 years ahead of the predictions.⁵

If the present rates of change continue, we can expect minorities to make up 50 percent of the U.S. population by the year 2030. This will mean that

⁵ U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Population by Race and Hispanic Origin 1990–2050," *Current Population Reports*, February 1996, Series P25-1130, Tables I and J.

when you reach the height of your personal and professional future, half of all Americans will belong to racial or ethnic minorities. What will diversity mean then? Will the term “minority” still be appropriate? Some see an amalgam of peoples that will lead to a new race, a “monochrome society.”⁶ Though we cannot predict in specific terms what the future will be, it is safe to say that it could be considerably different from the present.

It matters little what metaphors are used or what predictions are made. The future will be dynamic and different, just as our recent past has been. As Amitai Etzioni points out, “We came in many ships, but now we ride in the same boat.”⁷

Gays and Lesbians

You can’t tell someone’s sexual orientation just by appearance. The fact that a person is gay or lesbian doesn’t mean he or she is attracted to all people of the same sex (Are you attracted to all people of the opposite sex?). Also, being gay or lesbian is rarely a choice. Each year, scientists find further evidence indicating that sexual orientation may be influenced by genetic as well as environmental factors. Last, most child molesters are white male heterosexuals—not homosexuals.

Returning Students

Adult students (those 25 and older) are enrolling in college courses in record numbers. Women may make this choice after raising children, to learn skills for a new career. Other adults, men and women, may decide it’s time to broaden their horizons or prepare themselves for a better job with a higher starting salary. Many returning students work full-time and attend school part-time. Given the potential stressors of family and work, their persistence is remarkable.

Students with Disabilities

Students with learning disabilities cannot easily learn some academic skills, such as listening, thinking, speaking, writing, spelling, or doing math calculations. Even though they lack certain abilities, these students are of normal or above-average intelligence and are motivated to learn coping strategies that

⁶ James W. Russell, *After the Fifth Sun: Class and Race in North America* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1994).

⁷ Amitai Etzioni, *The Monochrome Society* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

aid them in facing different types of academic situations. Most learning disabilities are not readily apparent. If a friend confides to you that he or she is having problems with basic skills, you might urge that person to contact the academic skills center.

When you see a student with a physical disability, the most respectful thing to do is to greet him or her just as you would any other person. If the student is in your class, you probably should not go out of your way to offer help unless the person asks for it. A quadriplegic student once asked his teacher how he could explain to another student that he did not want her to always help him write his papers.

Discrimination and Prejudice on College Campuses

Unfortunately, acts of discrimination and incidents of prejudice are rising on college campuses. Although some schools may not be experiencing overt racial conflict, tension still exists; many students report having little contact with students from different racial or ethnic groups. A national survey, “Taking America’s Pulse,” conducted for the National Conference of Christians and Jews, indicated that blacks, whites, Hispanics, and Asians hold many negative stereotypes about one another. The good news is that “nine out of 10 Americans nationwide claim they are willing to work with people of all races—even those they felt they had the least in common with—to advance race relations.”⁸

You should be aware that in addition to being morally and personally repugnant, discrimination is illegal. Most colleges and universities have established policies against all forms of racism, anti-Semitism, and ethnic and cultural intolerance. These policies prohibit racist actions or omissions, including verbal harassment or abuse that might deny anyone his or her rights to equity, dignity, culture, or religion. Anyone found in violation of such policies faces corrective action, including appropriate disciplinary action.

If college is where you seek an education and develop values for life, appreciating people who are different from you is one of its major lessons. Regardless of the “group” you belong to, all college graduates have one thing in common: a degree that is the mark of an educated person. If you avoid the chance to know people from other groups, you’ll be missing out on many of the benefits of your education.

⁸ “Survey Finds Minorities Resent Whites and Each Other,” *Jet* 28 (March 1994).

YOUR PERSONAL JOURNAL

Here are a number of topics to write about. Choose one or more. Or choose another topic related to this chapter.

1. Many people today are enthusiastic about diversity. Others say, “Whatever will be will be. I don’t think it’s right to go out of my way to make friends with someone from another culture.” What do you think?
2. Write down five adjectives that you would use to describe yourself to someone you have never met or spoken with. Do any of the adjectives describe your race, gender, sexual preference, ethnicity, or culture? Or is your self-description based on other characteristics? Write the adjectives on a card and don’t put your name on it. Then pass it around the group and see if one or more students can identify you.
3. An older student arrives at class 10 minutes late each day and explains that she has to feed her child breakfast and drop him off at day care. How do you think the instructor should handle this?
4. How can you benefit from having a diverse set of friends? How can they benefit?
5. What behaviors are you willing to change after reading this chapter? How might you go about changing them?
6. What else is on your mind this week? If you wish to share it with your instructor, add it to your journal entry.

READINGS

Don’t Forget the Women*

African-American female college students.

By M. Rick Turner

With so much media attention focused on the plight of young African-American males, I fear that the experiences and challenges African-American females face often go unnoticed. This seems to be especially true for those attending predominantly white institutions. As a follow-up to my article “Where the Boys Are,” appearing in the Spring 2000 issue of *Black Issues in*

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Higher Education, I felt compelled to make sure that I, too, did not commit the unpardonable sin of ignoring our young women.

Our young women carry the burden of simultaneously being ambassadors for the race and cheerleaders for our young men. They encourage our males to get involved in university life so they can somehow ease the feelings of alienation.

Although African-American females don't talk too much (at least not with me) about the dearth of African-American males at our institution, I cannot help but believe that there are several serious social consequences to this issue. In the words of one African-American female, "Finding a man is a challenge because your choices are limited. First, because not many black males are admitted to the university and the numbers are getting smaller and smaller. So the number of black women and men is disproportionate. Many African-American women feel that African-American men are doing a good job surviving and that they should be given credit for being here because they could be involved in so many things that have nothing to do with going to school."

Over the past several years, I have asked African-American females in my sociology class to write papers and to conduct mini research projects and interviews with other African-American students about their experiences at the University of Virginia. Through their findings and my own conversations with female students in the Office of African-American Affairs, I am getting a better understanding of what it means to be a black female here.

Two third-year students, Miya Hunter and Chantale Fiebig, voluntarily emailed their thoughts to me. They seem to fully understand that the socialization of African-American females into womanhood is a complex process, and that the mother-daughter relationship, in particular, is central to understanding their experiences at a predominantly white selective institution. They both agree, as do many others with whom I have talked, that in order for African-American women to feel comfortable with who they are at UVA (or any campus), they need to feel strongly supported at home.

Black women often face many challenges in having their voices heard in classrooms. In many cases, students find themselves the only African-American in a class. They feel a certain degree of anxiety because they are expected to represent the black race as a whole. In the face of these issues, it becomes even more important that home is a constant source of encouragement, affirmation, and reassurance. It is critical that young women who question themselves at college feel as though they have a source of unconditional acceptance from home.

During the spring 2000 semester, LaTasha Levy, a fourth-year student in my class, conducted interviews and heard that there is often a "coldness" and tension among black females, too often over males.

African-American women often feel compelled to compete in fashion, in appearance, and for men. Although this type of competition is often healthy and somewhat natural in male–female relationships, it is also important to take note of what Hunter and Fiebig stated in their email to me: “In order to be here [at the university], they [African-American females] are active women who have proven that they possess initiative, an appreciation of education, and a willingness to work hard. None of these strengths should be compromised in efforts to cultivate a newfound social life, to enhance one’s appearance, or to attract male attention. Many women are able to enjoy healthy social lives while nurturing the positive traits that helped them arrive here in the first place. . . .”

Many African-American women recognize that they must address issues of respect for themselves and for each other. They must begin to have ongoing, open, and honest discussions about self-esteem, assertiveness, and internalized racism.

They must reflect upon how society, their upbringing, and/or early experiences with African-American women cause them to perceive each other with some level of mistrust and envy. Of course, as Levy noted in her work, “not all African-American women have to be best friends, nor should they consider themselves natural enemies. Sisterhood may in some respects seem Utopian, yet it is definitely something worth striving for.”

Students Reveal the Reality of College Diversity*

By James M. O’Neill

America’s most selective colleges have long defended affirmative action in admissions as vital to the kind of diverse campus that improves the academic experience for all students.

But many at those colleges express frustration at how diversity plays out once classes begin. They say:

Schools view diversity through too narrow a prism and students tend not to mix socially, short-circuiting the benefits of diversity.

Colleges might be diverse ethnically but fail the test for socioeconomic or political thought. They are largely composed of middle- and upper-middle-income students, and conservative political views are given short shrift.

Diversity should go well beyond race—though it is race that is the focus of the recent national debate about affirmative action.

**Knight Ridder/Tribune News Service*, June 11, 2003, p. K1259. Copyright 2003 Knight Ridder/Tribune. Reprinted with permission.

[When] the U.S. Supreme Court [was deciding in 2003 that narrow use of] affirmative action in admissions is legal, many selective colleges [were] on edge, worried that the student diversity they carefully craft [would] be at risk.

With that as a backdrop, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* conducted interviews with 45 students, chosen randomly, at seven selective colleges in the region . . . finding a jumble of opinions on affirmative action and diversity and how they affect the college experience.

From the University of Pennsylvania to Haverford College, from Bryn Mawr to Swarthmore, students offer up stories about how much more diverse the student body is compared with their mostly white, middle-class, suburban high schools.

“My freshman dorm was like the United Nations,” said Jacqueline Kahn, a Swarthmore junior. “My roommate was from Singapore. Down the hall was someone from Ireland. Upstairs was someone from Nigeria.”

That diversity generates a better classroom discussion, students say. Jillian Smith, a Dickinson College sophomore, said her courses on urban issues were better served by the presence of students who grew up in the inner city. “You can read about something, but that doesn’t mean you necessarily comprehend fully. Any time a [city] student shared a story, everyone in class understood more.”

Penn junior Brooke Dairman said one of her best friends on campus was someone she met by chance, an African-American who grew up in North Philadelphia. “It was eye-opening,” she said. “It showed me that friendships can transcend race. I was afraid that race would constantly be a centerpiece of our interaction, but it turns out we’re just people who are friends.”

Students say they actively sought out schools with diverse student bodies because they knew that would add value to their education. Bryn Mawr senior Rachel Brodsky put it this way: “If the idea of liberal arts education is to prepare you to think critically, it means you have to challenge your biases.”

But students say their schools fail to build campuses with political diversity.

“There’s definitely a liberal bias. Conservative opinions are shut down and dismissed offhand,” said John Anderson, a Swarthmore senior. “When a conservative point of view is brought up, there’s a knee-jerk reaction that it can’t be valid.”

Students suggest that the overwhelming liberalism fosters a self-censorship among conservatives who are unwilling to speak up in class or in social settings to provide the conservative view on issues.

“Haverford might look diverse, but everyone thinks the same,” said Jennie Gibson, a sophomore who doesn’t like to mention her conservative positions on campus. “I like debate, but there’s a difference between that and having people call you stupid when you say you support President Bush.”

Students also generally have the impression that their selective campuses are not diverse economically. Yet Swarthmore, for instance, points out that half its students are on financial aid, with the average aid package of loans and grants now \$25,146.

That aid ensures that less affluent students get to have the same experience as their wealthier peers, Swarthmore president Alfred Bloom said. As a result, he said, "It is not surprising that students themselves are not fully aware of the broad range of economic diversity within our student bodies."

Although they give high marks for campus ethnic diversity, students cite many forms of self-segregation: Athletes sitting together in the dining halls; frat houses exuding an aura of exclusivity; African-Americans living together in designated dorm space; the plethora of clubs dedicated to Latino, African-American, and other minority issues almost exclusively populated by students from those backgrounds.

"I do see self-separation, but people with similar ideas will tend to stick together," said Melissa Yarborough, a Bryn Mawr sophomore. "Minorities need a support group when they're in a sea of people different from them."

Minority students say white students often do not show interest in attending events sponsored by the minority organizations. "It's the old saying, 'You can draw a horse to water but you can't make him drink,'" said Kwesi Jefferson, an Ursinus freshman. "Students are not always interested in absorbing a diverse environment."

College presidents have heard this before. "We do recognize that these programs sometimes create a dilemma," Penn president Judith Rodin said. "Our students tell us although the programs are appreciated and helpful, they sometimes result in self-segregation among minority groups." But, she said, "We feel strongly that these programs are valuable."

Students have their own ideas about how to ensure that diverse views are encouraged. They point to their professors.

"Diversity has to be reflected in the faculty," Keya Anjaria, a Penn junior, said. "If you don't have a critical mass of faculty of color, students of color will never have a voice. So much of the dynamic of a university for students is seeking the evaluation, respect, and validity from the people you study under."

Ursinus president John Strassburger agrees. A "way to intrude on students' natural clannishness is through diversifying the faculty," he said. "They can and do play major roles in getting diverse students to engage in conversation out of class as well as in."

Some say that, because they often develop important long-term friendships with those they meet early on as first-year students, freshman housing is a key tool to ensure social mixing. Most schools assign freshmen randomly.

But some white students say another program targeted to freshmen works against mixing. Many schools hold a week or more of events for minority

first-year students before the rest of the freshman class arrives, designed to help them build leadership skills and deal with being a minority on a mostly white campus.

White students argue that, during that time, minority students tend to bond and form cliques that are difficult for white students to join.

“That’s a fair criticism,” Bryn Mawr president Nancy Vickers said. “But minorities say the program is among the single most important experiences of college. We need to strike a balance between the comfort zone for students of different backgrounds wanting to find people like themselves and what we can achieve socially by bringing minority groups on campus.”

Minority students generally said they do not experience overt racism on selective campuses. “But there’s overt ignorance,” said Ursinus’s Jefferson. “Like white students using urban vernacular to me, saying, ‘What up, homie?’ I have no problem with that in itself, but I do have a problem with the assumption that because I’m black, I would automatically talk that way.”

Every student interviewed saw campus diversity as a worthwhile goal. But the mechanics of affirmative action are not so uniformly praised. Some, like Penn freshman Andrew Dulberg, were uncomfortable with the idea that students with lower grades and test scores would be chosen over others with more stellar credentials partly because of race.

Swarthmore freshman Lauren Fety said affirmative action is “very, very, very not perfect.” She thinks about her friends back home in Oregon who come from lower-income backgrounds, who have no role models to inform them about selective colleges as an option, who had no access to advanced placement courses to improve their credentials, but who would not benefit from affirmative action—or even aggressive college recruiting—because they are white.

Other students were quick to defend affirmative action as a vital mechanism in the admissions process. They argue that, even beyond the goal of diversity, affirmative action is needed until larger societal problems, including lingering racism, are overcome.

Penn’s Dairman put it this way: “If all educational opportunity in America was fair and equal, admissions without affirmative action would work. But there are still socioeconomic problems that impact the quality of education . . . and we need to make up for that.”

DISCUSSION

1. Experts who study the nature of “diversity” on college campuses believe that every campus has a unique “climate” for diversity. Discuss with your classmates what this climate is on your campus.

2. First ask yourself this question and then discuss your initial reactions to it with fellow students: Have you experienced any changes in your thinking/understanding of the role of diversity in American society since you began college?
3. The article “Don’t Forget the Women” refers to African-American college females. If you are a member of that group, share with other students whether or not this portrait of African-American women at a highly selective public university struck you as being valid for your campus. If you are not an African-American female, what insights did you gain from reading this piece that might give you more empathy and understanding for the challenges faced by this group?
4. In the second reading, “Students Reveal the Reality of College Diversity,” students at four elite, private, residential colleges and universities in the Philadelphia area described their views on diversity. Would your opinion of diversity on your campus be similar or dissimilar to what is described by the students cited in this article? Where did this writer get it right, or wrong, based on your own experiences? What are the implications for your success in college?

