RETHINKING AFFIRMATIVE ACTION
IN ADMISSIONS TO HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS*

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ABSTRACT

My objective in this paper is a practical one: I seek to explore ways in which affirmative action policies in admissions to higher educational institutions might be restructured so as to generate greater net benefits. Drawing on my past work on affirmative action in the United States and India, I first reconsider some of my earlier conclusions; and then I go on to examine a variety of proposals for changing current practices in order to increase the benefits or decrease the costs arising from affirmative action applied to higher educational admissions.

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Introduction

The term “affirmative action” refers to policy measures designed to reduce the marginalization of groups that have historically suffered from discrimination, exclusion or worse, and that are under-represented in a society’s desirable positions. In this paper I focus initially on the most controversial form of affirmative action – positive discrimination in favor of members of identity groups defined in ethnic terms (broadly conceived to include race, caste, tribe, language and/or religion). Later on I address the desirability of other forms of affirmative action as well.

Positive discrimination refers to the provision of some amount of preference, in processes of selection to desirable positions in a society, to members of marginalized groups that are under-represented in those positions. The preference may be provided in various ways – e.g., reserved seats in separate competitions, or preferential boosts in a single competition; but it always has the effect of increasing the number of members of an under-represented group selected to a desirable position.¹ The primary overall effect of positive discrimination (PD) policies in admissions to higher educational institutions (HEIs) is to change the distribution of PD-eligible and PD-ineligible students across differing kinds of institutions. PD policies redistribute some of the former students upward into more selective and higher-quality institutions than they would otherwise attend; and they redistribute some of the latter students correspondingly downward.²

¹ Note that PD does not necessarily result in the displacement of better qualified applicants by less qualified applicants from targeted groups. Depending on the circumstances, a PD policy might either help to offset biases in conventional selection procedures or introduce additional biases into such procedures.

² The downward redistributive effect may be mitigated by increases in total enrollments on the part of institutions expanding the scope of PD admissions policies. In such cases, however, enrolled PD-ineligible students may experience some dilution in the quality of their higher education, insofar as the increase in overall student enrollment at an HEI is not matched by a corresponding increase in educational resources (faculty, staff and facilities).
PD policies are most salient in the most highly selective HEIs – elite institutions such as Harvard, Yale and Stanford in the United States, and the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) in India. Competition is fierce for entry into such institutions, and few students from marginalized groups are likely to be admitted without some degree of preference, because their typically disadvantaged backgrounds make it difficult for them to meet the highly demanding admissions criteria.

PD policies affecting elite HEIs are also most salient because such institutions prepare students for the most prestigious, most responsible and best-paying postgraduate opportunities and occupations. It is not only that study at an HEI offers the prospect of a first-rate education, conferring valuable human capital on the student. Potentially just as valuable are the contacts and networks to which a student gains access through her/his professors, administrators and peers, and the credentialing value of a degree from such an institution – all of which confers valuable "social capital" on the student.³ It is because the stakes are so high that competition for seats in elite HEIs is so intense, as is contestation over appropriate criteria for admission.

In my book comparing affirmative action experiences in the United States and India, as well as in related articles,⁴ I made a qualified case in favor of ethnicity-based PD policies in admissions to HEIs. My qualifications stemmed from the observation that such PD policies can generate a variety of costs as well as a variety of benefits, and whether or not the benefits outweigh the costs depends both on the way in which PD policies are structured and on the context in which they are applied.

³ The social capital bestowed by attendance at an elite HEI is particularly valuable for students from marginalized ethnic groups, and more generally for students from families of low socioeconomic status, because such students – unlike their more advantaged peers – are quite unlikely to have other sources of career-enhancing social capital.

In this paper I will first discuss two critical issues in PD policy formulation that I have addressed in earlier work, in each case adding some new observations based on more recent reflection. In section 1 I address an important potential problem with PD policies: the possibility of poor performance by PD beneficiaries. In section 2 I consider the oft-voiced criticism that PD policies favor well-off members of beneficiary groups rather than those most in need – or most deserving – of preferences. Then in sections 3 and 4 I turn to suggestions for changing current practices in order to increase the benefits or decrease the costs arising from PD policies in admissions to higher educational institutions; these sections reflect greater departures from my earlier thinking. In section 3 I address the troublesome fact that the immediate benefits as well as the immediate costs of PD policies are concentrated heavily on a very small number of people; this leads me to propose some ways to spread the benefits more widely and to reduce the impact of the costs. Then in section 4 I turn to the even more problematic fact that HEI admissions criteria tend systematically to reward situational advantage, even when PD policies are in force; and I discuss a number of forms of class-sensitive affirmative action that offer promise of lessening the impact of situational advantage on admissions decisions.

1. The potential problem of relatively poor performance on the part of PD beneficiaries

In past work on positive discrimination policies in admissions to higher educational institutions in the United States and India, I emphasized problems arising from the fact that the academic performance of PD beneficiaries tends to be poorer than that of their peers – for many understandable reasons related to disadvantages in background and preparation. Relatively poor performance at an HEI is not likely to be a serious problem if PD beneficiaries succeed in completing their degree programs; but lower rates of degree completion – higher rates of drop-
out or "wastage" – is a serious problem that detracts significantly from the potentially positive consequences of PD policies.

To minimize problems of poor performance among PD beneficiaries, I have recommended a number of modifications in PD policies as they are currently carried out in the U.S. and in India. My main recommendations along these lines are the following:

- Where quotas are used (as in India), replace them by (explicit or implicit) preferential boosts, so that the gap in pre-preferential qualifications for admission – as between PD beneficiaries and their peers – does not vary arbitrarily from year to year, and so that pressures for proportionate representation of marginalized communities do not force this gap up.

- Keep preferential boosts limited in magnitude, so that PD beneficiaries do not begin their studies at an HEI significantly behind their peers in preparation and in readiness for a challenging higher educational experience.

- Do not rely heavily on mechanical, quantitative admission criteria (such as standardized test scores), which tend to reflect the extent to which applicants have been trained or coached to succeed, and which are insufficiently sensitive to indicators of latent potential among poorly prepared applicants.

- Provide multi-faceted support – academic, social and financial – for PD beneficiaries attending an HEI, so as to help them overcome their disadvantages in background and preparation for higher education (especially in the most challenging elite institutions).
I still believe that these are helpful recommendations, especially in India where the practice of positive discrimination in higher education tends to depart from them to a greater extent than in the United States. As I reflect further on these matters, however, I have become more aware of some limitations on the potential of these recommendations to ameliorate PD policies. My principal concerns are the following:

- If the use of preferential boosts involves asking admissions personnel to make qualitative judgments about a variety of applicant characteristics, including membership in a PD-eligible group, then the whole process tends to become somewhat subjective and opaque. While a preferential boost system is surely preferable to a quota system, it would probably be best to apply it in the form of a certain number of points for PD-eligible applicants added to a quantitative index of admissibility.\(^5\)

- The ability of under-prepared PD-eligible applicants to handle a challenging academic curriculum is likely to be poorly predicted by indicators of the kind available to admissions personnel. Lowering the degree of (explicit or implicit) preference accorded to such applicants will on average reduce the extent of failure on the part of those admitted to an HEI, but it will still fail to include many applicants who would have succeeded and fail to exclude many applicants who do not succeed. Better ways need to be found of ensuring selection of PD beneficiaries who have a high probability of success in their studies.

\(^5\) Unfortunately this is precisely the practice of the University of Michigan that was declared unacceptable by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2003, which found acceptable the more subjective and opaque alternative; see *Gratz v. Bollinger* (02-516) 539 U.S. 244 2003.
• Reliance on multi-faceted and nuanced admission procedures – rather than simple quantitative criteria – might well increase the capacity to identify potentially successful PD-eligible applicants. If this means depending on admissions personnel exercising their own judgment, however, it becomes (as noted above) rather subjective and opaque, opening up possibilities of bias or favoritism. It would be preferable to maintain greater transparency with quantifiable criteria, while going beyond paramount dependence on conventional measures such as standardized test scores.

• The various kinds of support that can improve performance by under-prepared PD beneficiaries, desirable as they may be, are far from costless. It takes not only substantial financial resources, but also a good deal of motivation, time, and energy on the part of administrators and professors, to provide meaningful support for students disadvantaged by modest family backgrounds and relatively poor schooling. If meaningful support is to be provided to needy students, sources of funding for such support must be identified.

In sections 3 and 4 below I will explore proposals intended to respond to the concerns raised above.

2. PD benefits favoring well-off members of marginalized communities

Among the most frequent criticisms of PD policies, in both the United States and India, is that they tend to reward the best-off members of PD-eligible groups and therefore do little or nothing for the most needy members of those groups. In India this kind of sentiment has led to persistent demands that the "creamy layer" of marginalized communities (defined either as children of families exceeding a comfortable income level, or the children of parents who themselves have benefited from PD policies) should be excluded from PD eligibility. In the case
of OBC eligibility for reserved seats, a creamy layer exclusion was imposed at the national level by the Supreme Court of India in 1993; and such exclusions are also the rule in several of the Indian states.

It is certainly true that the direct beneficiaries of PD preferences in admission to HEIs come predominantly from relatively well-off families. For obvious reasons, the children of relatively well-to-do parents are far more likely to proceed successfully through primary and secondary education, and thus to be able even to consider embarking on higher educational studies. It is not so obvious, however, that one should deplore the fact that the direct PD beneficiaries in HEIs are disproportionately drawn from the upper strata of PD-eligible groups.

As I have suggested in previous work, the most important purpose that can be served by ethnicity-based PD in admissions to HEIs is not to redistribute educational opportunities from the rich to the poor. Instead, it is to reduce identity-based differentials in access to the upper strata of a society, i.e., to integrate the societal elite. The integration of members of disadvantaged and marginalized communities into respected occupations and responsible decision-making positions, where they have been significantly under-represented, can serve the general interest in a variety of ways – such as the following:

1. Elite integration can strengthen democratic institutions, insofar as it gives stronger voice to a broad range of concerns emanating from marginalized communities that might well otherwise be ignored.

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7 See, for example, the first part of Weisskopf (2007). In stressing the PD objective of integrating the societal elite, I have been strongly influenced by the work of Elizabeth Anderson (2000, 2002).
2. Better representation of marginalized communities in important decision-making positions can provide the political system with greater legitimacy.8

3. Better representation of marginalized communities in responsible jobs, in which familiarity with and understanding of such communities is a key asset, should improve performance of such jobs.

4. More numerous examples of success on the part of marginalized community members in rising to high-level positions in a society should motivate youths from such communities to believe in the possibility of their advancement and therefore to work harder to improve their future prospects.

5. More numerous examples of success on the part of marginalized community members in rising to high-level positions in a society should also help to dispel debilitating negative stereotypes about members of their community.

6. The presence of greater numbers of students from marginalized groups at an HEI may well enable other students to become better democratic citizens, more familiar with and attuned to the needs of a multicultural society.

7. Greater numbers of students from marginalized groups attending HEIs may well result in greater numbers of graduates who will provide public and community service.

These kinds of benefits from positive discrimination are in no way undermined by the fact that most of the direct beneficiaries of PD policies in HEIs come from relatively well-off segments of marginalized communities. To the contrary, it is the best-off members of such communities who are likely to be best positioned to succeed in their academic studies and to go on to high-status careers, thereby generating benefits for many others. The society-wide gains to be derived from PD policies are thus indirect and have a "trickle-down" character; exclusion of the creamy layer from eligibility for PD would significantly reduce those gains.

The indirect benefits of PD policies are more likely to be widespread, the greater the sense of common identity and the greater the degree of solidarity among group members. If

8 PD policies in the political arena are especially critical for democratic legitimacy, for they directly meet the fundamental need of nations to ensure political representation for marginalized groups – such as African–Americans in the U.S. and Schedules Castes in India – whose prior exclusion from power is tightly bound up with the history of the nation.
beneficiary groups do not display strong solidarity, then there is indeed good reason for concern that the indirect benefits of PD policies will be quite limited. It follows that creamy layer exclusions, or other mechanisms to distribute the direct benefits of PD policies in a more progressive manner to less well-off members of marginalized communities, are justifiable in the case of marginalized groups characterized by little solidarity – such as India's OBCs. Indeed, a variety of proposals to combine class and ethnic criteria to determine individual eligibility for PD have been proposed in India; some have actually been implemented by a few HEIs. And in the United States not a few scholars have gone further to propose that PD eligibility be based entirely on class status, rather than ethnic identity.

Such proposals, however, suffer from some significant weaknesses. First of all, class indicators are typically more difficult to measure and easier to falsify than ascriptive ethnic characteristics. The most common measure of class – family income – may be fairly verifiable in the United States, with its highly developed and broadly inclusive tax system; but non-wage income is unreliably reported, and variations in income (and family composition) over time make it difficult to arrive at an appropriate point estimate. Family income measures are all the less reliable in India, where the organized and well-documented sector is much smaller. Family wealth would be a better measure of long-term ability to pay, but it is far harder to estimate unless the estimate is based on very simple – and hence potentially unreliable – measures such as ownership of land or housing. Parents' education offers perhaps the most reliable measure of family socioeconomic status; but it is not highly correlated with family income and wealth, and

9 See Deshpande and Yadav (2006) for an ingenious proposal to combine class and ethnic criteria in PD admissions policies, Agrawal (2006) for a discussion of the kind of admissions policies actually implemented at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, and Ghosh (2006) for a critique of such policies.
10 See, for example, Kahlenberg (1995).
hence not that good an indicator of the deservingness of a family for PD benefits. (Would one wish to favor wealthy landowners with no higher educational degree over Dalits whose parents – thanks to earlier PD eligibility – have obtained college degrees?) Other possible measures of class include estimates of the wealth of the neighborhood or locality in which one was raised, or indices of the quality of one's secondary school; but these represent averages over a population that would not necessarily be representative of the class position of individual students. Furthermore, the use of such measures would create perverse incentives for families to take action in order to reduce their measured class status so that their children could benefit from PD. 11

A second problem with any kind of class-based eligibility for PD benefits (including creamy layer exclusions) is that they would substitute academically less-well-prepared for better-prepared beneficiaries, precisely because class status is a very good indicator of the extent to which one's background prepares one for meeting the demands of higher education. Success in higher education – and especially the critical elite HEIs – depends significantly on the cultural capital one gains from one's own family and its social circle (in India, proficiency in English is a critical example), and the quality of one's primary and secondary schooling, as well as one's access to tutoring or test-coaching classes, depends greatly on family income and wealth. Thus PD policies oriented to lower-SES students would reduce the proportion of beneficiaries likely to be successful in their HEI studies. At the very best, for lower-SES PD beneficiaries to achieve in HEIs rates of academic success (or just rates of degree completion) comparable to those that would be achieved by higher-SES beneficiaries would require the investment of far more

11 The use of estimates of income or wealth as indicators of class could also create such perverse incentives; among the indicators mentioned here, only parents' education would appear to preclude this possibility.
resources in academic preparation and support services, counseling and mentoring, as well as financial aid – so as to improve the capacity of under-prepared students to persist and succeed in the challenging academic environments with which they will be confronted.

The fact is that PD policies in admissions to HEIs are not well suited to redistribute opportunities from well-off to more poorly-off citizens, nor more generally to redress the class inequalities of a society. PD policies are much better suited to address the under-representation in high-status positions of members of marginalized communities, thereby potentially bringing indirect benefits to ordinary members of those communities alongside the direct benefits accorded to immediate PD beneficiaries. Where PD policies fail to generate such indirect benefits, it is probably best to try to ameliorate conditions for the less well-off by means of policies other than PD policies in higher education.

In casting doubt on the usefulness of injecting class-based criteria into the determination of individual PD eligibility, I do not mean to dismiss all concerns about creamy-layer dominance of direct PD benefits. I believe, however, that there are more promising ways of addressing this problem than by simply eliminating well-off members of marginalized groups from PD eligibility; and I will explore such alternatives in the remaining sections of the paper.

3. **Concentration of direct PD benefits and costs on a small number of individuals**

A PD policy provides its direct beneficiaries with access to a seat in a more desirable HEI than they would otherwise be able to attend; and it does just the opposite to an equivalent number of "PD displacees." A critical fact about gaining a seat at a more desirable HEI is that

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12 When a new PD policy at a desirable HEI is accompanied by an increase in the number of available seats to accommodate new PD beneficiaries, then there is no displacement of non-beneficiaries who would have gained a seat under previous conditions. In this event, however, the new PD beneficiaries are displacing other non-
it improves the long-term career prospects of a student. This is especially true of elite HEIs, as compared with the likely alternatives available to students who are denied access to the HEI. Thus a seat at an elite HEI represents a scarce and potentially highly valuable resource. The value of a seat at an elite HEI is all the greater to the extent that the costs of attending the HEI are lower than at alternative HEIs; and this is not infrequently the case because of government subsidies and/or private donations, which tend to be channeled in largest measure to the most elite institutions.¹³

Many of the problems of PD policies – and especially the heated opposition they often provoke – are attributable to the fact that such policies result in transfers of this valuable resource from some particular individuals to others. Just as the immediate gains are concentrated on a limited number of "lucky" PD beneficiaries, the immediate losses are concentrated on a few "unlucky" PD displacees.¹⁴ Furthermore, many of those non-PD-eligible applicants who would not have been admitted to a more desirable HEI – even in the absence of a PD policy – are likely to believe that their rejection is attributable to the PD policy, adding significantly to the number of self-perceived losers from such policies and thereby fueling more widespread resentment against them.¹⁵

¹³ The Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) are a good case in point. Student tuition fees at these public institutions are heavily subsidized, and the cost of attendance is far lower than at the best private alternatives.

¹⁴ If the former happens to belong to the creamy layer, and the latter is not particularly well-off, the situation is likely to arouse even more heated opposition. However, evidence from the United States suggests that PD beneficiaries – even though they are likely to come from the upper strata of their own communities – are on the whole not as well-off as PD displacees; see Weisskopf (2004), p. 210.

¹⁵ As Kane (1998, p. 453) has noted, many more unsuccessful applicants for admission to an HEI attribute their rejection to PD policies than the actual number of applicants displaced by such policies – in the same way as many
Proponents of PD policies point out, correctly, that the gains accruing to PD beneficiaries are likely to be significantly greater than the losses incurred by PD displacees. The alternative opportunities available to PD beneficiaries are likely to be significantly less promising, since a seat at a lower-quality and less prestigious HEI will not only provide a lower-quality education (and thus enable them to gain less human capital), but it will also gain them access to less valuable networks and connections (thereby imparting less social capital), in which they are especially likely to be lacking. PD displacees, on the other hand, will suffer less from a diminution in social capital, with which they tend to be better supplied independently of their higher educational experience; moreover, because they tend to come from better-placed families, they are likely to have a wider choice of alternative HEIs to attend.

The general societal interest would nonetheless clearly be better served by limitation of the losses directly attributable to PD policies, which would in turn tend to reduce resentment and opposition to PD. One way in which the magnitude of these losses could be significantly reduced is by ensuring that HEI-attending students from well-to-do families pay the full costs of their higher education. This is not the case in most of the public universities in the United States, where tuition fees for in-state undergraduate students are well below the cost of educating them; nor is it true of most of India's elite HEIs, where all students benefit from significant government subsidies. Requiring that students from well-to-do families pay full tuition costs would reduce the loss associated with failure to secure a seat in a selective HEI, even though the value of such

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more unsuccessful drivers attribute their failure to find a parking space to the existence of spaces reserved for handicapped drivers than the number of the latter who are actually able to park in a reserved space.

16 If the Indian Institutes of Technology charged well-to-do students the full costs of their education, then paying for an education at a top private engineering school would not appear so much inferior an alternative. Not only would this cushion the blow of being denied admission to an IIT; it might also lead some students voluntarily to choose a private institution instead.

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a seat (in improved long-term career prospects) would in all likelihood continue to exceed its cost, making higher education – especially at an elite HEI – still a very good investment. Students from less well-off families should be offered loans and/or grants on a sliding-scale, depending on their family resources, as has long been the practice at most U.S. HEIs. In India the difficulty of obtaining accurate data about family income and wealth makes such a sliding-scale approach more difficult; but simpler forms of means testing – perhaps distinguishing only a few different levels of family financial well-being – should be feasible.

There are some other ways in which one might be able to reduce the losses experienced by those who are – or who believe themselves to have been – displaced from attending a more desirable HEI by PD policies. First of all, it would help if the actual displacement impact of PD policies were better explained and disseminated, so that the number of students who believe they were displaced would better approximate the number actually displaced. It would also help if institutions applying PD policies would systematically assist rejected applicants – whether or not they were in any way affected by PD policies – in learning about and applying for available alternative educational opportunities.

The financial resources saved by eliminating tuition subsidies for well-to-do students could generate a substantial pool of funds with which to subsidize students from poorer families in greater numbers – and to a greater extent – than is currently the case. PD beneficiaries should be treated no differently than other students for purposes of determining tuition payments, loans and grants; but of course they would benefit disproportionately from the redistribution of funds proposed here, since they are disproportionately likely to come from families of limited means. Another good way to make use of additional funds generated by full-cost-paying HEI students would be to invest them in support programs for relatively under-prepared students – among
whom many, but by no means all, would be PD beneficiaries. This could be directed to tutorial programs for degree-program students, or to preparatory "bridge" programs of the kind I discuss in the following section. These kinds of proposals, which would benefit all students from poorly-off families, could – and should – be implemented independently of the application of PD policies; so they could not be presented as benefits generated directly by PD. Their implementation, however, would weaken concerns on the part of members of non-PD-eligible groups about domination of benefits by PD-eligible groups, and it would likewise weaken concerns about the domination of all PD benefits by a creamy layer.

There are other ways in which one could attempt to spread more widely the benefits – or at least increase understanding and acknowledgment of the benefits – accruing indirectly to others from the presence of PD beneficiaries at an HEI. Student peers of PD beneficiaries need to be persuaded of the benefits to themselves – in learning to operate effectively in a multicultural society – of participating in classroom and extra-classroom activities together with students of very different backgrounds than their own. And PD beneficiaries need to be persuaded of the importance of spreading back to their own communities – not just their own families – some of the benefits that they will realize from attending an HEI. One way in which the latter could be promoted would be via commitments to service in their own communities, along lines I propose in the next section.

4. Admissions criteria that over-emphasize situational advantage

Most higher educational institutions – especially the highly elite ones – take the view that they can best meet their objectives by attracting students with the highest possible levels of past academic achievement. In structuring admissions criteria, therefore, they look to indicators of
academic achievement that lend themselves to quantitative comparison and rank ordering. Scores on standardized examinations are the most widely used indicators of this kind, sometimes to the exclusion of all others. Measures of performance in secondary school – such as grade-point averages – are also often used; but such measures are hard to render comparable across schools unless they are based on nationally uniform standards.

In general, one would expect that rank-ordering students on the basis of evidence of past achievement, for the purposes of admission decisions, would serve the objectives of elite HEIs quite well. In many ways, those students who come to an HEI best prepared – as indicated by their past achievements – are likely to be best able to further enhance their level of education and skills at an HEI; and they are likely to contribute most to the education of their fellow students as well as to the research efforts of faculty. Although the “law of diminishing returns” suggests that there is more of an educational return to a dollar spent on education if the person to be educated has more to learn, this “law” is likely to be dominated – at least in relatively elite HEIs – by the principle of "building on the best:" the best-prepared applicants, who have already shown the greatest ability to succeed in their pre-HEI education, are likely to get the most out of an elite higher education.

This reasoning, however, suffers from a major weakness: it fails to take into account the implications of different possible sources of high levels of past achievement. On the one hand, strong past achievement on the part of an applicant to an HEI may be attributable in some part to the applicant's own native ability and/or effort expended (assiduousness, exertion, diligence, etc.). On the other hand, strong past achievement may be attributable in some part to her/his situational advantage – by which I mean the extent to which the environment in which s/he has grown up has been conducive to high academic achievement. Someone from a well-educated
and reasonably well-off family gains much cultural capital from her/his immediate family, tends to have access to good primary and secondary schools, and is also likely to have access to tutoring and test-coaching that can significantly raise standardized test scores. Conversely, someone from a poorly-educated and poorly-off family will suffer in all these respects from situational disadvantage. The degree of one's situational advantage is largely a function of one's family's socioeconomic status (SES). The fact that measures of academic achievement are almost everywhere highly correlated with SES indicators suggests that situational circumstances are indeed an important determinant of academic achievement.

A problem arises for HEI admissions from the fact that past academic achievement may not be a good predictor of future achievement, insofar as it is attributable to situational advantage rather than to high ability or strong effort. An HEI setting serves as something of a situational equalizer for admitted students; so, once a student is admitted to an HEI, ability and effort is likely to be at least as important as situational advantage in contributing to good academic performance. It follows that criteria for admission of students with the strongest potential for contributing to HEI objectives should ideally give extra weight to that part of an applicant’s past achievement that does not result from situational advantage.  

Probably the most egregious kind of situational advantage enjoyed by applicants to HEIs from high-SES families is access to tutoring and coaching services designed explicitly to raise test scores. While such tutoring and coaching may impart some additional knowledge and skills that are useful in contexts other than high-stakes test-taking, there is undoubtedly a very low rate

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17 Note that crediting evidence of ability and effort, while not crediting situational advantage, would maintain the same strong incentive for students to do well in their pre-university education as crediting measures of overall past achievement.
of return – in genuinely useful human capital – to these kinds of activities. Yet the incentive to
invest in them is huge for students and their families, because the payoff from access to a
prestigious HEI is the prospect of a significantly more lucrative career path. The whole test-
oriented tutoring and coaching phenomenon is of course highly unfair to those who cannot afford
to participate in it. It injects a significant distortion into an admissions criterion – the
standardized test score – that is heavily relied upon for determining admission to an HEI, for it
reduces the ability of the admissions process to identify applicants with the most potential to
achieve HEI objectives. Furthermore, it constitutes a significant waste of educational resources
that could be put to uses much more productive for the society as a whole as well as for the
individuals involved (except, of course, for their interest in enhancing their own admissibility to
an HEI).

The considerations raised above draw attention to several kinds of obstacles confronting
low-SES students (including, disproportionately, PD beneficiaries). Even when they have the
same innate ability and apply the same amount of effort, having therefore the same ultimate
potential do to well as a comparable high-SES student, they will be subject to the following
kinds of difficulties because of their situational disadvantage:

- Their poorer academic preparation – reflected in lower measures of past
  academic achievement – will make it harder for them to meet the academic
  demands and challenges of an education at a high-quality HEI;

- They are vulnerable to being disdained or patronized by faculty, to whom they
  are likely to appear less capable than their better-prepared peers;
• Their lower endowments of cultural capital will make it harder for them to integrate socially with other students.

For low-SES PD beneficiaries (as well as for students incorrectly assumed to be in this category), there may well be additional difficulties:

• They may encounter covert, if not overt, identity-based discrimination on the part of faculty or fellow students;

• Their relatively low scores on standardized tests and other indicators of past academic achievement – to the extent that these are known or can be inferred by others – will give the impression that PD policies have accorded them a preferential boost much larger than its true magnitude, assessed in terms of indicators of true academic potential as opposed to measured academic achievement.

For HEI admissions policies to be successful in selecting students with the highest potential, and for policies favoring under-prepared students to be recognized more widely as legitimate, ways must be found to limit the impact and the import of situational advantage.

The most direct approach to counteracting the distorting effects of situational circumstances is of course to reduce the extent of differences in such circumstances. Any program that reduces overall socioeconomic inequalities in a society will clearly help; and efforts to reduce differentials in access to good-quality primary and secondary education are particularly
important in the context of access to higher education. But even if primary and secondary school quality could be fully equalized – an ambitious and costly goal – access to higher education would not be equalized, since family background would remains an important source of differential situational advantage. Other approaches to reducing situational advantage must therefore also be considered.

One less ambitious and costly approach is to address the under-preparation of less privileged students between their completion of secondary school and prior to their application for admission to an HEI. One cannot overcome the disadvantages of less cultural capital and poorer primary and secondary schooling in just one or a few years. But a pre-HEI preparatory school that admits and trains promising low-SES students can make a considerable difference in enhancing their admissibility to high-quality HEIs, and also in offsetting the unfair advantages gained by high-SES students through differential access to various forms of test-coaching. At the same time, such a preparatory school would enable its students subsequently to cope more successfully with the academic and social challenges of persevering and succeeding in such an HEI. There are already a few examples of such schools in India, notably the "Super 30" tutorial center for underprivileged students in Patna and the "Centre of Excellence" in Kerala. Such preparatory schools can be oriented to low-SES students in general or to PD-eligible groups in particular. In the latter case, they can serve as a complement or – if sufficiently widespread – as

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18 In this discussion I will focus attention on admissions to first-level HEI degree programs. My arguments can also be applied, with minor modification, to admissions to higher levels of higher education – e.g., graduate school programs.

19 On the Super 30, see The Little Magazine, Vol. 6, Issue 4&5 (2006), pp. 112-115. On the Centre for Excellence, affiliated with the Indian Institute of Management, Kozhikode, see http://www.cex.ac.in. The "POSSE Program" in the United States fulfills a similar function, but instead of a full-time preparatory program of study, it brings together students for additional classes and activities while they are enrolled in secondary schools; see http://www.possefoundation.org.
an alternative to PD policies in admissions to HEIs. As an alternative, they would have the advantage of greatly reducing many of the problems associated with PD in HEI admissions, such as relatively weak performance by PD-beneficiaries and hostility on the part of non-beneficiaries; but they would of course require a considerable investment of financial resources.

At present, both the United States and India, HEIs practicing affirmative action are already incurring additional costs by providing extra resources to support low-SES students (and sometimes PD beneficiaries in particular) in their studies at the HEI. Some U.S. universities are reaching out to secondary schools to assist disadvantaged students in strengthening their capacity to embark on higher educational studies – especially in contexts where positive discrimination in admissions is no longer permissible. Such efforts, if carried out and funded on a much larger scale, could complement ongoing PD admissions policies, rendering them more successful and hastening the day when they are no longer needed; or they could substitute for PD admissions policies.

Another approach to offsetting situational advantage involves modification of the criteria used to rank students for admission to HEIs. I have stressed the desirability of evaluating applicants not primarily on the basis of their overall past achievement but substantially on the basis of that part of their achievement that is attributable to native ability and effort applied. These latter qualities are of course very hard to measure directly; but one could do so indirectly by developing a quantitative estimate of "relative" past achievement" as distinct from "absolute" past achievement." This can be done by determining how an applicant’s past academic

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20 In the case of the IITs in India, this extra support takes the form of an initial preparatory year at the IIT before under-prepared PD beneficiaries enter classes and programs that other students begin in their first year at the IIT.
performance (conventionally measured) compares to what might be expected, given the initial situational circumstances of the applicant.

For example, one could begin with scores on the same standardized tests that are commonly used to measure an applicant’s absolute achievement, and then control for situational circumstances. Via a multivariate analysis that links test scores to a variety of situational characteristics of the test-takers, one could establish group means for test-takers with differing socioeconomic backgrounds – as well as other possibly relevant background characteristics, such as geographical location and ethnic identity. A test-taker’s relative past achievement could then be calculated as the difference between the person’s actual test score and the mean test score of the group of test-takers with the same background characteristics. Those who do well by this criterion have been described in the United States as "strivers."²¹ The approach discussed here would enable applicants for admission to an HEI to be credited in a systematic, quantitative way for their capacity to overcome a variety of different kinds of situational disadvantage – including ethnicity-based discrimination.

Although the approach discussed in the previous paragraph corrects for some of the unfairness and arbitrariness of standardized tests, it also reifies such tests by accepting them as valid assessments of an applicant's past academic achievement, worthy of a significant role as an admissions criterion. A more radical approach would abandon use of standardized tests altogether. Indeed, because of the way they reward situational advantage, some colleges in the

²¹ "Strivers" is perhaps not the best term to use here; although it does mean to do one's utmost, it focuses on the effort expensed and not the extent to which that effort is successful. See Lemann (1999), chapter 23, for a discussion of attempts to implement this kind of an approach by the U.S. Educational Testing Service. Over time, careful quantitative analysis of past admission decisions and outcomes might contribute to better understanding of which background characteristics should be used to distinguish relative from absolute past achievement, and what factors are most likely to reveal latent potential in applicants with low levels of absolute past achievement.
United States have stopped considering SAT results as part of their (complex) admissions processes. The problem with such an approach is that – for all their problems – standardized tests do correlate well with academic performance in an HEI – especially in the first year, which is crucial to student motivation and perseverance through a higher educational program. Moreover, the usual alternative to the use of standardized tests is a holistic and qualitative admissions process that introduces a Pandora's box of subjectivity into admissions decisions – as well as considerably greater costs.\textsuperscript{22} As long as potential for good academic performance is considered relevant to qualifications for admission to an HEI (as will always be the case for an elite HEI), there would seem to be no alternative to making use in some way of conventional measures of past academic achievement, such as test scores and grades; and where large numbers of applicants are involved, standardized tests that render their achievement more comparable will necessarily be part of the picture.\textsuperscript{23}

How then could one limit the reward to situational advantage and credit latent potential in under-prepared students, while avoiding excessive dependence on standardized tests and allowing for positive discrimination where the case for it is strong? I think that some combination of the following proposals offers much promise. None of these proposals is entirely new; and some have already been put into practice by HEIs in the United States and (less often)

\textsuperscript{22} An alternative to holistic and qualitative admissions processes that would avoid such subjectivity is a lottery system. To use a lottery system without appealing to any standardized test scores, however, would in all likelihood result in admitting many applicants who would be unable to meet the challenges of degree programs in a selective HEI because of inadequate academic preparation.

\textsuperscript{23} An even more radical approach to HEI admissions would be to remove criteria of academic achievement altogether from the admissions process, and to embrace an entirely different – and much more democratic – notion of what qualifies a person for higher education; thus Guinier (2003) argues for admissions criteria based on "democratic merit." While such proposals have considerable appeal, if applied wholesale they would amount to a revolution in higher education that would completely redefine the mission of an HEI. It would seem more realistic to think of such an innovation as defining a new type of "democratic" HEI that might usefully coexist with the traditional type of "meritocratic HEI," where merit is defined to a considerable extent in terms of past academic achievement.
in India. It may be useful nonetheless to review them here, and to consider how they could be combined into an approach to HEI admissions that would significantly depart from current practice – especially in India, where standardized test scores remain paramount.

1. Greater weight on secondary school GPA or class rank.

Past academic achievement is most often measured first and foremost by performance on standardized tests, even where measures of academic performance in secondary schools – such as grade-point average (GPA) or class rank – are taken into account. In admissions to U.S. HEIs, outstanding academic performance *per se* in a high school tends to carry relatively little independent weight, because it is discounted by evidence on the academic quality of the school – which is correlated with the degree of difficulty of courses offered. An outstanding academic performer in a low-quality high school, with few advanced courses available, gets far less credit than an outstanding performer in a high-quality high-school who has taken many advanced courses. Thus the rank ordering established by standardized test scores tends to be reproduced when all the academic evidence from applicants' high schools is factored in.

A strong case can be made, however, for weighting secondary school GPA or class rank as strongly as standardized test scores, without discounting at all for the academic quality of the secondary school. High academic achievement in a school of relatively low quality surely does not reflect as high a level of academic skills and knowledge as it would from a much higher quality school; but it does reflect motivation and capacity to do well in a competitive situation, under circumstances that are far from ideal. Indeed, it tends to measure what I described earlier as "relative academic achievement." As such, it would appear to be a fairly good indicator of effort and ability, as distinct from situational advantage; and it could therefore provide some
indication of academic potential realizable under more favorable circumstances. Indeed, research in the United States on determinants of student academic performance in higher education suggests that high-school GPA is at least as important as standardized test scores in predicting college-level GPA.\textsuperscript{24}

2. Credit for citizenship.

In the United States, many HEIs – especially elite ones – seek to attract students on the basis not only of their academic potential (based largely on measures of past academic achievement) but also of their potential for making socially useful citizenship contributions. Thus HEI applicants are typically rewarded for evidence of active involvement in public affairs, organizational leadership and voluntary service in their pre-university years. This is generally done in the context of a multifaceted admissions process that relies on admissions officers to take into account such citizenship qualifications, along with academic qualifications, in arriving at an admissions decision. In India the practice is much less widespread, because it requires a substantial commitment of resources to the admissions process itself, and because there is much less documentation of the pre-university activities of applicants.

Yet it makes good sense to broaden indices of admissibility to an HEI by giving significant weight not only to evidence of potential academic achievement but also to evidence

\textsuperscript{24} According to Tienda et al. (2003, p. 43), there is "a large body of literature showing that high school grades are one of the best predictors of long term success in college, while standardized test scores predict freshman grades (and little else)." The significance of high-school grades for college performance is further substantiated by calculations I have made with evidence from the "10\% plan" in Texas, under which, since 1997, students ranked (by GPA) in the top 10\% of any high school in the state are guaranteed admission to one of the state's flagship universities. My calculations suggest that the college-level academic performance of students in the top 10\% of relatively low-quality high schools has been comparable to that of students with higher SAT scores who are below the top 10\% of relatively high-quality high schools. The data underlying this comparison are provided in annual official reports from the University of Texas admissions office; the most recent one available to me can be found at: http://www.utexas.edu/student/admissions/research/HB588-Report11.pdf.
of potential to make contributions to one's community and one's society via civic engagement or public service. A serious effort to measure and reward applicants' potential for such citizenship contributions certainly increases the costs of the admissions process, but the payoff can be substantial. As a practical matter, it might be best to develop for each applicant an overall quantitative measure of past "citizenship achievement" that could be used to adjust a quantitative measure of academic potential (based on test scores and class ranks), so as to arrive at a broader overall index of admissibility. This would require careful study of the kinds of evidence of past activities that could be adequately documented and relied upon to indicate citizenship potential. An important question to be resolved would be: what weight should be attached to indicators of citizenship achievement as compared with indicators of academic achievement? Different HEIs could be encouraged to experiment with different relative weights before a general consensus is sought.

An admissibility index reflecting citizenship as well as academic potential should further reduce the importance of situational advantage in determining an applicant's admissibility to an HEI, because activities reflecting citizenship potential tend to rely more heavily on ability and effort, and less on situational advantage, than does academic achievement. Such situational advantages as a strong command of the English language and access to good primary and secondary schools contribute less to citizenship than to academic prowess; and access to tutoring and test-coaching in no way augments one's citizenship. Of course a well-to-do family background facilitates both citizenship and academic achievement; but the advantages of wealth can be limited if the indicators of citizenship are chosen so as to minimize bias in favor of the well-to-do. Broadened admissibility indices incorporating citizenship values would enable low-SES applicants (including PD beneficiaries, disproportionately) would fare better in competition
with their more advantaged peers, even in the absence of any preferential boosts or reserved seats. An additional benefit of including citizenship measures in admissibility criteria is that it would create stronger incentives for young people to engage in socially useful activities.

Should the effort to develop a quantitative indicator of citizenship potential prove too daunting, or too expensive, there is another approach to crediting citizenship that could be introduced instead. Applicants could be accorded additional points in a broadened admissibility index in exchange for commitments to undertake public or community service after graduation – say for at least two years, to make it a significant commitment of time. In this way one could move from rewarding estimated potential social contributions to rewarding actual contributions, of a kind that situationally disadvantaged applicants might well be readier to take on than their more privileged peers (who upon graduation tend to have greater and more lucrative opportunities for advancement). Public or community service is surely a reasonable basis for preference in admissions, and one that is likely to be widely regarded as legitimate.

3. Bridge programs.

A number of HEIs in the United States and India already offer "bridge" programs designed to prepare relatively under-prepared students for entering their regular degree programs. Many U.S. universities have summer programs of this kind, aimed at students admitted with relatively low indicators of past academic achievement; and the Indian Institutes of Technology have one-

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25 One would of course need to establish ways to enforce such a commitment, via penalties for its abandonment, as well as ways to handle students who do not succeed in completing their degree program after having been admitted with the aid of citizenship points.

26 It is relevant to note that a great many graduates of elite HEIs in India go abroad for higher study and employment, so India loses the direct benefits of their (often highly subsidized) higher education. Indian students with relatively disadvantaged backgrounds tend to be less cosmopolitan and more tied to their families, and they are correspondingly more likely to make use of their higher education within their own country.
year preparatory programs for the most under-prepared reserved-category students, before they begin a degree program. The bridge program concept could be modified in a number of respects, so as to serve more broadly as a way of increasing access to HEI degree programs by students with disadvantageous backgrounds.

For example, suppose that every elite HEI establishes a one-year preparatory program for as many students as it typically admits each year to degree programs. (Thus the HEI would need to accommodate the same number of additional students as would be the case if it extended its degree programs by one year). The purpose of this program would not be literally to provide a bridge into an HEI degree program, but to prepare disadvantaged students to compete for admission to HEIs on more equal terms with more privileged students – by increasing their capacity to do well on relevant standardized tests and, more generally, by providing them with experience in an HEI environment that will make them better able to cope with the academic and social challenges of an HEI degree program. This kind of bridge program would not guarantee a seat in an HEI degree program; that would depend on how well each bridge student does at the end of the bridge year, in competition for admission to degree programs with applicants who have not participated in the bridge year as well as with other bridge program students. Admission to the bridge program should be based on exactly the same criteria used for admission to degree programs. And students entering the bridge program should be charged tuition fees, etc., on the same sliding-scale basis as students entering degree programs (see my proposals in section 3).

Under a bridge program of this kind, first-time applicants with strong academic backgrounds, whose admissibility index score is high enough to gain them entry directly into a
degree program, would presumably choose to do exactly that.\textsuperscript{27} Once the degree programs were filled, admission to the bridge program would be open to other applicants. Starting with the highest-scoring applicant remaining, and working downward by admissibility index score, each applicant in turn would be able to decide whether to enter the bridge program or not, until the size limit of the bridge program class was reached. The alternative to entering the bridge program would be for an applicant to spend a year preparing elsewhere to retake the entrance examination and have her/his admissibility index recalculated for the following year's competition. This alternative could be quite appealing to an applicant from a well-to-do family, who would find it considerably less expensive to pay the costs of private tutoring or test-coaching as a way of improving her/his standardized test score (and who might be able to undertake activities that would increase her/his citizenship points as well). On the other hand, an applicant from a poorly-off family would be unlikely to have a better alternative than to join the bridge program at a low out-of-pocket cost. Thus the bridge program would be populated predominantly by disadvantaged students, but not exclusively – for any student would have the right to enter it if her/his admissibility index score were high enough.\textsuperscript{28}

The opportunity to evaluate the performance – and in particular the progress – of under-prepared students in HEI bridge programs would surely serve as a more reliable way of assessing

\textsuperscript{27} Entry of such a high-scoring applicant into the bridge program, instead of a degree program, would not be precluded; but one would expect it to be rarely desired.

\textsuperscript{28} A limit would need to be set on the number of times an applicant could compete for entry into a given HEI's bridge program or its degree programs. I would suggest that applicants who do not enter a bridge program should be allowed two opportunities to compete for entry into a degree program, and that applicants who participate in a bridge program have two subsequent opportunities to do so. After two such failures to enter a degree program in a given HEI, applicants should be required to look elsewhere if they wish to pursue higher educational studies. One could allow applicants to participate in an HEI's bridge program for more than one year, but only if their test score improved significantly after the first year – yet not quite enough to gain admission into a degree program. Under these relatively unusual circumstances, an applicant could be permitted two subsequent opportunities to compete for entry into a degree program.
their academic potential than searching for evidence of high potential in their earlier academic (and general life) experiences. Moreover, the opportunity for such students to enter bridge programs would serve directly to compensate for their disadvantage vis-à-vis more advantaged students in access to private tutoring and test-coaching services; and it would help to reduce their disadvantage in cultural capital and access to good primary and secondary schooling.

4. A lottery system.

A number of observers of HEI admissions processes have questioned the relevance of distinguishing between applicants whose scores on standardized tests exceed a fairly high threshold.\(^\text{29}\) Certainly such scores – over a wide range – correlate well with success at an HEI; but it is not so clear that, at the high end of the scale, differences in admissibility scores make much difference. What is clearer is that the highest fractile group of the score distribution will be dominated by situationally advantaged applicants, and that the proportion of disadvantaged applicants represented in a fractile group will increase with each successively lower fractile.\(^\text{30}\)

For the sake of argument, let us equate the size of one fractile group (in %) to the number of applicants whom an HEI can admit in order to form its entering class.\(^\text{31}\) In an admissions process relying only on standardized tests, all applicants in the top fractile group are admitted – and no others. Now consider the following alternative: a lottery system in which every applicant

\(^{29}\) See Carnevale and Rose (2003), who estimate the impact of the kind of lottery system I propose here on admissions to selective HEIs in the United States. See also Jerome Karabel's case for a lottery system of admissions in a New York Times op-ed piece (9/24/07).

\(^{30}\) This will be less true the more the admissibility index departs from standardized test scores. But even when class rank and citizenship points are factored in, admissibility indices are still likely to reward situational advantage – but to a lesser extent than test scores.

\(^{31}\) Not all applicants admitted will necessarily choose to enter the HEI; but the HEI admissions office will work with a yield ratio of matriculating to admitted students based on past experience.
in the top two fractile groups has an equal chance of admission. To admit just enough students to constitute an entering class of the same size, the chance of admission for each applicant in the top two groups would have to be 50% – in which case, on average, the admitted students would be drawn half from each fractile group.32

The implementation of such a lottery system would have a number of beneficial consequences. First of all, it would enable a greater number of relatively disadvantaged applicants to be admitted to an HEI, since their proportion in the second fractile group is greater than in the first. Assuming that it is indeed the case that the potential for success on the part of an applicant does not diminish much from the top fractile group to the next one, this would be achieved with little reduction in the expected average level of performance by all admitted students. One could increase further the proportion of disadvantaged students admitted by conducting the lottery over the top three or more fractiles, rather than just the top two – at the cost of a lower threshold test score for admission, and hence some further reduction in the average expected performance level of the admitted students.33

A second beneficial consequence of such a lottery system is that neither the set of winners nor the set of losers would be defined in terms of ethnic identity, as is the case with ethnicity-based PD policies. This would reduce a significant cost of many PD policies, in the form of increased ethnic consciousness and inter-ethnic tension. Finally, a lottery system would reduce the excessively high premium now placed on improving standardized test scores on the

32 This assumes that the yield ratio is the same for applicants in the second as in the first fractile group – an assumption that could be modified in concrete cases, as distinct from this hypothetical one.

33 Quantitative analysis of the relationship between entry pre-admission test scores and post-matriculation performance levels would enable admissions officers in any HEI to determine how much of an effect on expected performance the lowering of a threshold score would actually have; this information could then be used to help determine the optimal threshold level for entry into any given program.
part of applicants whose scores are already very high. These are students who are disproportionately likely to enjoy great situational advantage, and for whom improvement of test-taking capability brings little substantively useful academic improvement and hence little if any social benefit.

Those applicants for an HEI degree program whose admissibility scores place them in an admissible fractile group, but who lose out in the lottery, would have several options. If they had applied to any other HEIs, and if their application to one of them were successful, they could choose to enter that one. If they were intent on entering the original HEI, they could apply again the following year until they reached the limit on the number of times one could apply to the same HEI. In the latter case an applicant would need to spend the intervening year in ways likely at least to maintain her/his score, or to improve it if the original score were close to the threshold score for participation in the lottery – presenting a risk that the applicant might not reach the threshold score the next time around. Finally, every unsuccessful applicant to a particular HEI could choose to apply to a different one in a subsequent year – or to pursue an alternative to higher education.

6. Conclusion

The four proposals that I advanced in section 4 can be implemented in any combination. Standardized test scores may be adjusted for class rank or GPA, as well as citizenship, to yield overall admissibility scores; these scores can then be used as basis for determining entry into an HEI bridge program or an HEI degree program. Broad admissibility scores can also be used as a

34 This limit might reasonably be set at three, rather than two, in the context of a lottery system where admission with a good test score is uncertain
basis for participating in a lottery, whether for entry into a bridge program or a degree program. The greater the number of the above-suggested proposals that are incorporated into an HEI admissions process, the greater the extent to which one can counter situational advantage and credit latent potential in under-prepared students.

By reducing the situational advantage enjoyed by well-to-do applicants, as reflected in raw standardized test scores, all of the above proposals would benefit lower-SES applicants – and they would do so independently of their ethnicity. Thus these proposals do not represent ethnicity-based positive discrimination; they can be considered instead a class-sensitive form of affirmative action. To the extent that they improve admissions prospects for some applicants, they do so not on the basis of ascriptive characteristics often perceived as morally irrelevant and arbitrary; instead, they reflect real disadvantages that conceal academic potential, or real contributions to society (in the form of leadership, community service, etc.). These kinds of class-sensitive policies are therefore much more likely to be perceived as fair and reasonable, and much less likely to arouse rancor and hostility, than PD policies. Since PD-eligible applicants are disproportionately likely to come from low-SES families, such applicants would benefit disproportionately from the implementation of the proposed policies. This makes the proposed class-sensitive policies attractive as an alternative to PD policies, where – as in an increasing number of states in the U.S. – PD policies have been made illegal in public institutions.

It remains the case, however, that class-sensitive affirmative action would benefit not only members of PD-eligible groups but many other members of PD-ineligible groups as well. Thus implementation of such policies could not possibly increase the representation of PD-eligible groups in selective HEIs as much as a program of equal impact designed explicitly to
favor PD-eligible groups. It follows that, where the case for an ethnicity focus remains strong, and where ethnicity-based PD policies are permissible, it would be best to implement such policies together with class-sensitive policies.\textsuperscript{35} This could most readily be done by applying PD policies in the form of preferential boosts that would add a pre-determined number of points to a PD-eligible applicant's admissibility score, while simultaneously implementing any or all of the class-sensitive policies discussed above.

In any case, the kinds of class-sensitive policies I have discussed in sections 3 and 4 would significantly reduce the salience of situational advantage in the competition for valuable seats in selective higher educational institutions. They would also significantly reduce the resentment of applicants who failed to secure such seats, because the dividing line between winners and losers would not be defined by ethnicity. Even where such resentment is based on misperception, or when it seems morally unjustifiable in the larger scheme of things, it constitutes a very real problem – detracting from the net benefits of affirmative action and threatening the sustainability of positive discrimination policies.

\textsuperscript{35} Carnevale and Rose (2003) also recommend maintaining ethnicity-based PD policies along with class-sensitive policies – as is often the practice in U.S. HEIs.
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