

Resolution 68: To End Legacy Admissions

Abstract: This resolution calls upon Cornell University to end Legacy Admissions. This is a collective work of the Presidents of multiple Ivy-league Universities.

Sponsored by: Patrick Kuehl '24

Co-sponsors: Clyde Lederman '26, Yash Moitra '27

Reviewed by: Executive Committee, DD/MM/YYYY

Type of Action: Sense of the Body

Originally Presented: 03/21/2024

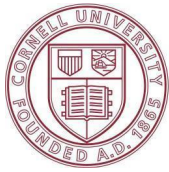
Current Status: Pending Assembly Adoption

WHEREAS, Cornell University was founded on the principle of “any person, any study”, and;

WHEREAS, today, nearly every elite institution practices legacy admissions preferences, granting preference to applicants on the basis of their familial relationships with alumni of the institution, including but not limited to: Harvard University, Yale University, Stanford University, Princeton University, Brown University, University of Pennsylvania, Cornell University, Columbia University [...];

WHEREAS, the history of legacy preferences in admissions began in the early twentieth century as a discriminatory strategy to exclude immigrant and Jewish students from accessing higher education;¹

¹Coe and Davidson, 2011: *THE ORIGINS OF LEGACY ADMISSIONS, A SOCIOLOGICAL EXPLANATION*:
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/23055549>



Cornell University Student Assembly

WHEREAS, today, the practice of legacy preference admissions has been proven to inhibit social mobility,² undercut socioeconomic and racial diversity,³ and reproduce cycles of privilege⁴;

WHEREAS, a 2019 National Bureau of Economic Research study found that three-quarters of white legacy students, athletic recruits, and children of alumni and donors would not have been otherwise admitted at Harvard University;⁵

WHEREAS, studies have indicated that having at least one alumni parent increases a student's rate of admission by 45%,⁶ and legacy status students are almost four times as likely to be accepted to an elite college than non-legacy applicants with identical test scores;⁷

WHEREAS, in 2023, polls⁸ indicated 70% of Americans across political party lines agree that colleges should not be allowed to consider legacy status in admissions, and three quarters of college students believe legacy preference admissions is unfair⁹;

WHEREAS, empirical studies have refuted justifications for legacy admissions, finding no evidence of a causal relationship between legacy admissions and total alumni donation giving in top universities,¹⁰ and no correlation between legacy admissions and university revenues¹¹;

² William C. Dudley, President of the Federal Reserve, Remarks at the Council for Economic Education's 56th Annual Financial Literacy & Economic Education Conference, New York City, 2017:

<https://www.newyorkfed.org/newsevents/speeches/2017/dud171006>

³ Howell and Turner, 2004: *LEGACIES IN BLACK AND WHITE: The Racial Composition of the Legacy Pool*:

<https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1023/B:RIHE.0000027390.19997.f4.pdf>

⁴ Chetty, Deming, and Friedman, 2023: *Diversifying Society's Leaders? The Determinants and Consequences of Admission to Highly Selective Colleges*:

https://opportunityinsights.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/CollegeAdmissions_Nontech.pdf

⁵

⁶ Klapper, 2023, The Nation: *It's Time to Abolish Legacy Admissions*:

<https://www.thenation.com/article/politics/affirmative-action-abolish-university-legacy-admissions-scotus/>

⁷ Miller and Bhatia, 2023: *How Big is the Legacy Boost at Elite Colleges*, New York Times:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/27/upshot/ivy-league-legacy-admissions.html>

⁸ Springs, 2023, Data for Progress, survey of 1,200 likely voters:

<https://www.dataforprogress.org/blog/2023/8/16/eliminating-legacy-admissions-has-bipartisan-support>

⁹ 2023 AXIOS poll on legacy status in admissions:

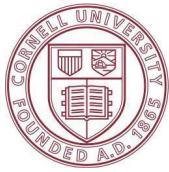
<https://www.axios.com/2023/07/18/poll-college-students-say-legacy-admissions-arent-fair>

¹⁰ Coffman et. al, *An Empirical Analysis of the Impact of Legacy Preferences on Alumni Giving at Top Universities*:

https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/production.tcf.org/app/uploads/2016/03/08201915/2010-09-15-chapter_5.pdf

¹¹ Shadowen et. al, 2009, Santa Clara Law Review: *No Distinctions Except Those Which Merit Originates: The Unlawfulness of Legacy Preferences in Public and Private Universities*;

https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1299224



Cornell University Student Assembly

WHEREAS, various peer institutions such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Amherst College, New York University, the University of California, Johns Hopkins University, the California Institute of Technology, Pomona College, the University of Oxford, and the University of Cambridge have either abolished or never used this practice;

WHEREAS, in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court decision declaring affirmative action practices at Harvard University and the University of North Carolina to be unconstitutional,¹² the unequal and unjust nature of legacy admissions has been increasingly evident;

WHEREAS, in their dissents of *STUDENTS FOR FAIR ADMISSIONS, INC. v. PRESIDENT AND FELLOWS OF HARVARD COLLEGE*, both Supreme Court Justices Gorsuch and Sotomayor aligned, stating that “while race-neutral on their face, too, these [legacy] preferences undoubtedly benefit white and wealthy applicants the most”¹³;

WHEREAS, in 2023, while instructing the Department of Education to investigate Harvard University’s admissions practices, President Biden stated that “practices like legacy admissions and other systems [...] expand privilege instead of opportunity”¹⁴;

WHEREAS, post-affirmative action, institutions such as Wesleyan University have abolished legacy admissions, noting that “if [Wesleyan] is going to be aggressive [...] about creating diversity within the law as it now exists, we have to remove the obstacles to diversity. One of those obstacles is advantaging people whose parents went to our university”¹⁵;

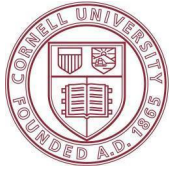
WHEREAS, the elimination of affirmative action and subsequent ability for college admissions to consider a student’s identity groups, acknowledgement and preference given to legacy status is increasingly indefensible;

¹² June, 29, 2023: Supreme Court rules 6-3 in favor of the petitioner, Students for Fair Admissions Inc. *STUDENTS FOR FAIR ADMISSIONS, INC. v. PRESIDENT AND FELLOWS OF HARVARD COLLEGE*;
https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/22pdf/20-1199_hgdj.pdf

¹³ June, 29, 2023: Supreme Court rules 6-3 in favor of the petitioner, Students for Fair Admissions Inc. *STUDENTS FOR FAIR ADMISSIONS, INC. v. PRESIDENT AND FELLOWS OF HARVARD COLLEGE*;
https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/22pdf/20-1199_hgdj.pdf

¹⁴ Hamid and Mete, 2023. *The Harvard Crimson: Supreme Court, President Biden Take Aim at Legacy Admissions*;
<https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2023/6/30/legacy-scrutiny-sffa-harvard/>

¹⁵ Wesleyan University President Michael Roth, in an interview with NBC News 4 on July 19th, 2023. Mavredakis, 2023: *The Wesleyan Connection: “Media Roundup: Wesleyan Ends Legacy Admissions”*;
<https://newsletter.blogs.wesleyan.edu/2023/07/20/media-roundup-wesleyan-ends-legacy-admissions/>



Cornell University Student Assembly

WHEREAS, legacy admissions bestows unfair privilege on those whom need it least, as students with legacy status, on average, have greater access to high quality education, testing preparation, and strong extracurricular profiles;

WHEREAS, the elimination of legacy admissions will serve to strengthen socioeconomic and racial diversity, reduce income inequality, boost social mobility, and have no major effect on university revenue or donations¹⁶;

NOW BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED, the Student Assembly of Cornell University and the undersigned leaders of our peer institutions implores Cornell University to end its practice of legacy admissions.

Patrick Kuehl

President - Cornell University Student Assembly

Julian Suh-Toma

President - Yale University Student Body

Mina Sarmas

President - Brown University Student Body

Teji Vijayakumar

President - Student Body of Columbia College

¹⁶ Hurwitz, 2010, *The impact of legacy status on undergraduate admissions at elite colleges and universities*:
https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0272775710001676?casa_token=7qb5K3u1F8gAAAAA:DjRLTpX2lKnSTpkL_UK9DCXH_oYDOFdvzbkYgK74bo888yqvJIH5MZ0H02dzEgLP4uDnCs0Ug
