

Behind the Scenes in the Diversity Wars

by Patricia Hausman

A recent paper openly discusses how the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) factored race into the admissions process—revealing an approach suggesting it to have been far more than a "tie-breaker" among similarly qualified applicants.

From 1995 to 1999, MUSC used a screening formula that assigned applicants an Academic Profile (AP) score ranging from 2.6 to 14.9. The score was based on college GPA, MCAT score, and the selectivity of the undergraduate institution attended. The Academic Profile scores of applicants classified as underrepresented minorities (URM) were then granted an across-the-board increase of 1.5 points. The practice was discontinued in 2000 due to legal concerns about "granting special consideration to groups based on demographic considerations."

The paper presents a retrospective analysis of how the practice affected the chances of applicants being selected for interview—an essential step in the path to admissions. The impact of the additional points on Academic Profile scores of minority and non-minority applicants is shown in the following charts adapted from the paper.

Median rank of Underrepresented minority (URM) applicants before and after addition of extra points to Academic Profile

	1996 (n=387)	1997 (n=507)	1998 (n=514)	1999 (n=625)
URM, unadjusted	351	452	448	555
URM adjusted	240	349	322	436

Median rank of Non-minority (NM) applicants before and after addition of extra points to Academic Profiles of URM applicants

	1996 (n=387)	1997 (n=507)	1998 (n=514)	1999 (n=625)
NM, unadjusted	181	230	229	277
NM adjusted	192	247	249	291

The paper does not analyze the extent to which the additional points were critical to applicants obtaining admissions offers. The authors say only that "the [score] adjustment helped many [URM] secure interviews who would have been excluded without [it]." They add that in 2000, when the policy was no longer in effect, interviews of URM applicants fell by 23%, admissions offers by 41%, and actual matriculation by 50%.

The citation is:

Basco, W., Gregory, G.E., and Blue, A.V. Estimating the pre-interview rankings of under-represented minority applicants when ethnicity is not considered in the admission process. *Academic Medicine* 76: S55-S57, 2001. Request reprints from William T. Basco, Department of Pediatrics, Medical University of South Carolina, P.O. Box 250106, Charleston, SC 29425. bascob@musc.edu.