



ENDING LEGACY ADMISSIONS

Legacy admissions policies are designed to give preference to applicants based on their familial relationship to alumni, typically benefitting White and wealthy students whose families have had the privilege to attend college for centuries.¹ By definition, these policies perpetuate the racism of decades past when our higher education system was closed to Black, Latinx, and Indigenous communities.

Approximately one-third (30 percent) of public universities and two-thirds (65 percent) of private nonprofit colleges with competitive admissions favor applicants who are related to alumni.² When choosing to consider legacy status in admissions decisions, **institutions are baking racial and socioeconomic injustices into their present-day campus culture, and perpetuating privilege by:**



ADVANTAGING LEGACY APPLICANTS

One study found that legacy applicants were 45 percentage points more likely to gain admission to a selective institution than equally qualified, non-legacy candidates after controlling for other factors.³ In fact, at some highly selective colleges, legacy status equates to scoring 160 points higher on the SAT.⁴

At Stanford University and the University of Virginia, legacy applicants are about twice as likely to be admitted than students without a family connection to the institution.⁵

In fall 2018, Harvard University admitted roughly 5 percent of all applicants, while legacy applicants made up roughly 37 percent of the incoming class.⁶



GIVING LEGACY STUDENTS ADDED SUPPORTS

Legacy applicants can receive special treatment during the admissions process—support that underserved students need most. For example, at some institutions, admissions offices provide an alternate admissions process for legacy applicants, including special interviews, consultations, and advice.⁷



DIRECTING FINANCIAL AID AWAY FROM STUDENTS WITH NEED

Legacy financial aid policies, like tuition reductions or granting in-state status to out-of-state legacy applicants,⁸ direct dollars to students from privileged backgrounds rather than directing as much financial assistance as possible to students with the most financial need.⁹ For example, at the University of Kentucky, legacy applicants who do not reside in Kentucky can pay in-state tuition if their parent is a member of the UK Alumni Association.¹⁰

Institutions claim that legacy policies improve yield, increase alumni commitment to the institution, and increase alumni donations. However, one analysis of the top 100 universities found no statistical evidence that legacy policies influence alumni giving behavior.¹¹

OPENING THE DOOR TO OPPORTUNITY: ENDING LEGACY ADMISSIONS

Legacy policies persist because institutional leaders choose to keep them in place. Combatting racism and classism involves upending inequitable policies, even if doing so is uncomfortable.

INSTITUTIONAL LEADERS SHOULD:

STOP CONSIDERING LEGACY STATUS WHEN MAKING ADMISSIONS DECISIONS:

Ending these policies would provide first-generation students, students from low-income backgrounds, and Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students a more equitable shot at admittance to selective institutions. In 2020, Johns Hopkins University's president led the charge to eliminate its legacy admissions policy after finding that the policy stifled access.¹² Other university leaders should follow suit.

FOCUS SUPPLEMENTARY ADMISSIONS GUIDANCE AND RESOURCES TOWARD UNDERSERVED STUDENTS:

To remedy inequities, institutions should offer these types of benefits to first-generation students, for example, who often do not have access to college counselors or family members who have experienced the intricacies of the admissions process.¹⁵

In the words of higher education leaders:

"Public universities have a public purpose, including serving students of all backgrounds. That starts with an admissions process rooted in fairness....Preferential admissions decisions for relatives of alumni—known as legacy admissions—are not consistent with this commitment to fairness."

— PETER MCPHERSON,
President, Association of Public and Land-grant Universities¹³

"Maintaining the long-standing tradition of affording such students a routine admissions advantage based solely on their parentage had come at a high cost. It was impairing our ability to educate qualified and promising students from all backgrounds and to help launch them up the social ladder."

— RONALD J. DANIELS,
President, Johns Hopkins University¹⁴

For full citations, please visit: www.ihep.org/mostimportantdoor/sources

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12. Daniels, 2020.
13. McPherson, 2019.
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FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT WWW.IHEP.ORG