

Supreme Court Upholds Affirmative Action

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On June 23, the Supreme Court delivered its most important ruling on affirmative action in 25 years. The decision upheld a principle that Columbia President Lee Bollinger had spent the last six years defending in two cases involving admissions policies at the University of Michigan, where he served as president before coming to Columbia in June 2002.

During that time, Michigan's staunch position on policies promoting diversity elicited a groundswell of support from a vast range of leaders and organizations inside academia and beyond, including General Motors, Microsoft, Steelcase, and other U.S. corporations, labor and religious leaders, and distinguished military leaders and institutions.

In *Grutter v. Bollinger*, the Supreme Court ruled in a five-to-four vote to uphold a program at the University of Michigan's law school that considers race as one factor in admissions decisions. Bollinger called the ruling a "great victory for American higher education, and for the nation as a whole" and viewed it as a reaffirmation by the court of the importance and the educational benefits of a diverse student body.

In the other case, *Gratz v. Bollinger*, the court struck down a point system used by the University of Michigan to give minority status, among many factors, weight in undergraduate admissions. Bollinger noted, however, in a *Washington Post* op-ed article, that in its decision, the court affirmed the central principle set forth in *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* in 1978—that race may be considered by colleges and universities as a factor in making admissions decisions.

"By rejecting an absolutist argument—by affirming the notion that race may be considered in an appropriate manner in the admissions process—the court has helped ensure that public and private colleges and universities in the United States will remain accessible to all Americans of all backgrounds," Bollinger wrote. "And it

has helped ensure that American higher education will continue to educate our youth for the increasingly diverse world they will inherit.”

The decisions will not affect Columbia’s admission policies, which reflect the University’s long-standing commitment to maintaining a diverse student body.



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