



## **Diversity Among Equals:**

A Report on Educational Opportunity and the  
State of Affirmative Admissions  
in New England

### **FACT SHEET**

#### **Significance of the Issue**

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- Between 1986 and 1999 enrollment at postsecondary institutions in New England grew by 36% for African Americans, 68% for Hispanics, and 52% for Native Americans – compared to 5% for White students.
- The more than 80,000 Minority students in these institutions are only slightly above 10% of the region's total college students, still below their share of the 18-24 year old population, which was nearly 19% in 2000, and expected to grow quickly<sup>1</sup> in the next decade.
- Minority populations and immigrants will play a central role in the new regional economy. There is an urgency to provide equitable education and training beyond high school to these individuals in order to sustain regional economic growth.
- The regions' higher education institutions have taken crucial steps toward assuring the vitality and vibrancy of New England's future economy and civic life through their practice of Affirmative Admissions.

#### **Affirmative Admissions Defined**

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- Affirmative Admissions is broadly defined as: the use of race or ethnic background as one of many criteria used to inform admissions decisions and to increase Minority student representation on campus.
- Affirmative Admissions is frequently misunderstood by the general public, which perceives that it results in unqualified Minority students being accepted over qualified White students.
- Affirmative Admissions is practiced in order to (a) compensate for past and/or current discrimination or inequities in educational opportunities for populations under-represented in higher education; and/or (b) provide learning environments in which all students can experience the educational benefits of a diverse learning community, and campus communities that reflect the workplace/society students will encounter after graduation.
- Two types of Affirmative Admission strategies are examined in this report:

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<sup>1</sup>The number of minorities entering the labor force in the region is expected to grow from 13% to more than 30% in Connecticut and Massachusetts by 2012 (MISER, 1993)

- **Enhanced Rate:** Accepting a higher percentage of Minority students to compensate for their lower yield rate.
- **Reduced Threshold:** Reducing admissions standards to admit greater numbers of Minority students.

## Key Findings of Study

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The study reports on how education leaders perceive Affirmative Admissions, the nature of Affirmative Admissions policies at four-year colleges and universities in New England, and the numbers of students affected by current admissions practices.

- Perceptions of Affirmative Admissions are not always consistent with the reality of college admissions practices in New England.
- Reduced Threshold Affirmative Admissions is **NOT** occurring in New England: There is clear evidence that four-year colleges and universities in New England colleges do **not** engage in the practice of reducing standards to admit greater numbers of Minority students.
- Accepting a higher percentage of Minority students (Enhanced Rate) compensates for the lower “yield” rate (the percentage of accepted students who actually enroll/matriculate) of these students. For example, a college might accept 30% of its White student applicants and 34% of equally qualified Minority student applicants, because lower percentages of the Minority students than the White students accepted will actually enroll.
- Minority students accepted at four-year colleges and universities are qualified to attend these institutions; and are as likely as Majority students to succeed in college based on meeting the same academic standards.
- Most types of four-year colleges and universities in New England practice Enhanced Rate Admissions, not just private, more selective institutions as was assumed from prior research completed in the field.
- Most college and university leaders in New England believe in the importance of a diverse student body as an essential part of undergraduate education.
- Relative to their proportion in the population, Minority students continue to be under-represented as a percentage of the undergraduates in the region.
- The pool of qualified Minority students needs to be expanded.

## Study Methodology

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- The *Diversity Among Equals* research methodology included:
  - (1) legal analysis of issues related to college access and equity;
  - (2) interviews with K-12 leaders and educators at the state, district and school levels in each of the New England states (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts; New Hampshire, Rhode Island and

- Vermont); and a survey of college and university administrators and state leaders;
- (3) econometric<sup>2</sup> modeling to assess the impact of Affirmative Admissions across the region using data from The College Board.
- Analysis examined whether four-year institutions admitted Minority students with lower academic credentials than the minimum required of White students and the differences in admission rates.
  - New England colleges and universities were divided into 18 segments, defined as public or private; by geography; whether located in Northern (Maine, Vermont and New Hampshire), Central (Massachusetts) or Southern (Rhode Island and Connecticut) segments of New England; and level of selectivity.
  - Selectivity was determined by analyzing institutions' admissions competitiveness and minimum SAT and GPA score standards.

### **Interview/Survey Results: New England Higher Education Leadership**

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- Nearly 2/3<sup>rd</sup>s of all institutions and 85% of 4-year institutions indicated that recruiting a diverse student body was an institutional priority.
- Campus leaders indicated that Affirmative Admissions are appropriate and necessary for recruiting diverse student bodies.
- Over 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of survey respondents agreed that there were not enough qualified Minority applicants.
- The majority of education leaders interviewed believe that challenges to Affirmative Action in admissions are more likely to be important elsewhere in the country than in New England.
- In part because of actions taken in Massachusetts, public higher education leaders in this state seem most aware and concerned about potential legal challenges to Affirmative Admissions out of all of the New England states.

### **Policy Recommendations from *Diversity Among Equals***

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#### **Colleges and Universities in New England should:**

- 1) work with policymakers and K-12 educators to increase the numbers of Minority students who aspire and are prepared to attend college and attain a degree
- 2) clearly articulate what diversity means on their campuses and document how the benefits of diversity are valued as an integral part of their educational missions
- 3) continue to seek many forms of diversity in their admissions processes
- 4) use multiple criteria in the admission process

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<sup>2</sup> Application of mathematical and statistical techniques to economics in the analysis of data and development of models

- 5) invest adequate resources in the admissions and enrollment management process
- 6) conduct analyses and assessments of their own admission policies and practices in order to achieve institutional diversity goals.

### **General Recommendations**

- 7) Given the complexity of issues surrounding Affirmative Admissions, educational leaders in New England need more information about the current parameters of and potential future legal challenges to Affirmative Admissions.
- 8) New England's proud history of promoting educational access and diversity should serve as a foundation for providing unwavering support for Affirmative Admissions at the institutional and state levels.

### **Citation and Contact Information**

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*Diversity Among Equals* was completed by The Massachusetts Institute for Social and Economic Research (MISER) and the Center for Education Policy (CEP) at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, and commissioned by the Nellie Mae Education Foundation. Principal investigators of the report were Stephen Coelen, Ph.D., Director of MISER and Professor of Political Science and Economics (Tel. 413-545-3460; scoelen@miser.umass.edu); and Joseph Berger, Ph.D., Associate Director of CEP, Associate Director of MISER and Assistant Professor of Education (Tel. 413-545-4184; jbberger@educ.umass.edu).

**For More Information:** For a copy of the study, go to [www.nmefdn.org](http://www.nmefdn.org) or contact Ms. Sharon Davis, Nellie Mae Education Foundation, at 781-348-4257 or [sdavis@nmefdn.org](mailto:sdavis@nmefdn.org).



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