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SHOULD COLLEGES USE AFFIRMATIVE ACTION?

Word Generation - Unit 2.02

Focus Words

affirmative | discrimination | aspect | retain | relevant



Weekly Passage

College admissions can be very competitive. Elite colleges admit only half or a quarter of the students who apply. Because the process is tough, admissions decisions can be controversial.

Some colleges look at students' races during admissions. Suppose an African-American student and a white student are similar. They have about the same grades and test scores. The African-American student may be more likely to be accepted. This is called "Affirmative Action." Colleges may use this to increase the number of minorities on campus. The idea is that racial diversity helps college students learn to work with people from different backgrounds.

Affirmative Action is designed to make up for past discrimination. African-Americans and Latinos were kept out of college in past generations. Students from these groups today are less likely to have family members who went to college. They may have less inside knowledge about college preparation.

Without Affirmative Action, fewer minority students will attend elite colleges. At UC Berkeley, the number of African-Americans admitted dropped from 562 to 191 after the school stopped using race as one aspect of admissions. Looking at this experience, people argue that race should be retained as a factor in admissions.

Others say Affirmative Action is not fair because it can discriminate against white students. These people believe schools should only look at grades and test scores. They think that the color of a student's skin is not relevant. Is it important for colleges to have racial diversity? Should they use Affirmative Action?

TEACHER - Discussion Questions

- ▶ What kinds of discrimination have you seen in your life?
- ▶ Why do some colleges use Affirmative Action?
- ▶ Some colleges use race as one aspect of admissions. What are some other aspects colleges look at in admissions?
- ▶ Do you think skin color should be relevant to college admissions?
- ▶ Should US colleges retain their Affirmative Action programs?

Unit 2.02**Should colleges use Affirmative Action?****Focus Word Chart - TEACHER VERSION**

Word	Meaning	Forms			Related Words
		Inflectional	Basic Word Classes	Prefixes/ Suffixes	
affirmative	(adj.) - positive		affirm (v.)	affirms affirming affirmed affirmation	firm confirm
discrimination	(n.) - prejudice toward a particular group of people	discriminate (v.) discriminates discriminating		discriminatory indiscriminate	
aspect	(n.) - a part of something; a characteristic	aspects		aspectual	prospect suspect perspective
retain	(v.) - to keep; to hold in place	retains retaining retained		retention retentive	detain sustain contain obtain
relevant	(adj.) - connected		relevance	irrelevant	relieve elevate lever leaven

Should colleges use Affirmative Action?

Problem of the Week



Affirmative action is meant to give groups that have faced **discrimination** a better chance to succeed in American society. College attendance is **relevant** to success because college graduates usually make more money. Therefore, affirmative action programs in college might be a good way to help these groups. U.S. courts have decided that colleges can **retain** some, but not all, affirmative action programs.

In 2008, the U.S. Census Bureau found the following:

- ▶ 40% of white 18-24 year-olds were enrolled in college.
- ▶ 32% of African-American 18-24 year-olds were enrolled in college.
- ▶ 26% of Hispanic 18-24 year-olds were enrolled in college.

Option 1: Which of the following shows the fraction of Hispanic 18 – 24 year-olds enrolled in college in 2008?

- A) $\frac{1}{3}$
- B) $\frac{8}{25}$
- C) $\frac{13}{50}$
- D) $\frac{16}{25}$

Option 2: The year is 2008. Two 18-24 year-olds are chosen at random. One person is African-American, and one is white. How much more likely is the white person to be in college than the African-American person? Express as a percentage.

Answer: The white person is 25% $[(40 - 32) / 32]$ more likely to be in college.

Discussion Question: In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson described the need for **affirmative** action this way:

“You do not take a man who for years has been hobbled by chains, liberate him, bring him to the starting line of a race, saying, ‘you are free to compete with all the others,’ and still justly believe you have been completely fair . . . We seek not just freedom but opportunity—not just legal equity but human ability—not just equality as a right and a theory, but equality as a fact and as a result.”

Women and non-whites have faced prejudice and **discrimination** in America. Therefore, when the question of fairness arises, race and gender are seen as **relevant aspects** of the people involved. Some people think that America has become less prejudiced. As a result, they say, today’s America should not **retain** affirmative action. But have we achieved “equality as a fact and as a result”? Or did President Johnson chose the wrong goal?

Unit 2.02

Should colleges use Affirmative Action?

Debating the Issue



GO!

1. Get ready...

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A Affirmative Action should be legal in college admissions because it is the only way to give minorities a fair chance.

B Affirmative Action helps everyone benefit from diversity on college campuses.

C Affirmative Action should not be legal because it discriminates against white students.

D Affirmative Action should not be legal because it leads colleges to judge students by their skin color, not by their abilities.

E _____

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these.

I believe that...

I agree with you because. . .

You make a good point, but have you considered...

Can you show me evidence in the text that supports what you said?

2. Get set...

Be ready to provide evidence to back up your position during your class discussion or debate. Jot down a few quick notes:

TEACHER

Whatever the debate format, ask students to use academically productive talk when arguing their positions. In particular, students should provide reasons and evidence to back up their assertions. It may be helpful to read these sample positions to illustrate some possibilities, but students should be encouraged to take their own positions about the issue at hand.

Unit 2.02

Should colleges use Affirmative Action? Science Activity

Professor Kahn's class is talking about **Affirmative Action**.

"One of our Supreme Court Justices is a Hispanic woman," says Alan. "Why should we **retain** programs that help women and Hispanics get ahead? Minorities used to face **discrimination**, but not anymore. Affirmative Action just isn't **relevant**."

"Racism is complicated," says Alejandra. "It affects all different **aspects** of our lives. Take my name, for example. When a manager sees a resume from me, Alejandra Ortiz, and one from, say, Jennifer Smith, who gets a phone call, Alejandra or Jennifer?"

"Good question!" says Professor Kahn. "Let's find out!"

Question:

Are hiring managers less likely to call job-seekers with Hispanic names?

Hypothesis:

Hiring managers will be less likely to call a job-seeker with a Hispanic name.

Materials:

- ▶ A made-up resume



This activity is designed to help you practice thinking like a scientist and to use this week's focus words. Sometimes the data are based on real research, but they should never be considered true or factual.

TEACHER

Real Research:

-In the paper cited below, researchers constructed resumes for fictitious job-seekers. They assigned either a very White sounding name (examples given were Emily Walsh or Greg Baker) or a very African American sounding name (examples given were Lakisha Washington or Jamal Jones) to each resume, and recorded which resumes received callbacks. (The terms "White sounding" and "African American sounding" are the terms chosen by the researchers.) The researchers found that, on average, people with African American sounding names received callbacks 50% less often than people with White sounding names.

The notion of a "White sounding" or an "African American sounding" name is, of course, controversial. A person of any background may be named "Lakisha Washington" or "Emily Walsh" and a name that sounds African American or White to one person may sound different to another. In the hopes of introducing the interesting outcome of the actual experiment to the discussion while sidestepping potential controversy over the premise, we used "Hispanic" instead of "African American sounding" in the fictitious WG experiment.

Bertrand, M. and Mullainathan, S. (2004, September 4). Are Emily and Greg more employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A field experiment on labor market discrimination. American Economic Review, 94. A version from May 6, 2003 was retrieved on December 8, 2009 from http://economics.uchicago.edu/download/_DISCRIMINATION.pdf

Classroom Discussion: While the WG experiment is fictitious, real studies have shown that employers respond differently to names that suggest different backgrounds. Is this surprising? How does this finding connect to this week's topic? Which side(s) of the debate could it support?

Procedure:

1. Create a resume for a pretend person who wants a sales job.
2. Find 60 businesses that are hiring salespeople.
3. On 30 resumes, write the name “Alejandra Ortiz.”
4. On 30 resumes, write the name “Jennifer Smith.”
5. Send the resumes to all 60 businesses.
6. Count the number of businesses that call back.

Data:

	Number of Callbacks
Alejandra Ortiz	10
Jennifer Smith	20

Conclusion:

Is the hypothesis supported or not by the data?

Supported

What evidence supports your conclusion?

More hiring managers called “Jennifer Smith” than “Alejandra Ortiz” despite the fact that their resumes were identical.

How would you make this a better experiment?

Encourage students to consider sample size, number of trials, control of variables, whether the procedure is a true measure of the question, whether the experiment can be repeated by other scientists, data collection and recording systems, and other potential explanations for the outcome. Students should understand that these simple experiments represent the beginning of an exploration, not the end. If time permits, have students suggest how the experiment could be strengthened, emphasizing the use of the target words in the discussion.



Writing Prompt

Should colleges use
Affirmative Action?

Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

Focus Words

affirmative | discrimination | aspect | retain | relevant

A tool to help you think about your own writing!

Remember you can use focus words from any of the WG Units.

Check off what you accomplished:

Good Start

- ☐ Stated my own position
- ☐ Included 1 focus word

Pretty Good

- ☐ Stated my own position clearly
- ☐ Included 1-2 arguments
- ☐ Included 1-2 focus words

Exemplary

- ☐ Stated my own position clearly
- ☐ Included 1-2 arguments
- ☐ Included 1 counterargument
- ☐ Used 2-5 focus words

TEACHER

Ask students to write a response in which they argue a position on the weekly topic.

Put the writing prompt on the overhead projector (or the board) so that everyone can see it. Remind students to refer to the word lists in their Word Generation notebooks as needed.

Unit 2.02

Source References:

- » The Affirmative Action and Diversity Project: www.aad.english.ucsb.edu
- » Understanding Prejudice: www.understandingprejudice.org/readroom/articles/affirm.htm
- » So You Wanna Know: www.soyouwannaknow.com/site/pros_cons/affaction
- » Find Articles: www.findarticles.com/p/articles/nt_m1254/is_n4_v30/ai
- » PBS: www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/education/jan-june98/admissions_4-1.html