

STATE OF MICHIGAN LAW DAY 2004 ESSAY CONTEST

“To Win Equality by Law”

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Should Michigan universities use a “legacy” preference to give children of alumni an advantage in admissions?

Tradition and Legacy preferences or Equality and Justice?

Jordan Levine received extra points during the admission process at the University of Michigan, because his stepmother and grandfather had attended U of M. Should Michigan Universities use a “legacy” preference to give children of alumni an advantage in admission? This subject is one of the most controversial among universities. There are many reasons Michigan universities should not give children of alumni extra points for admission.

Highly accredited high school students always dream about being admitted to an elite university. Therefore, fair admission avenues should be wide open for the skilled individuals that meet university requirements. Legacy admission preferences that are used as a tradition in those elite schools, may work against minorities, highly skilled students, and students with no alumni connections. The saying “Tell me who you know, not what you know” may be true when applying for a job, but make no mistake, when applying for admission to a university, it must always be about “what you know.” Admission to universities should be first given for highly qualified students based on equal and fair opportunities regardless of where their parents went to school. Applicants would then be satisfied so their ambitions may be realized.

Core democratic values that relate to this case are equality and justice. Equality would require that universities treat everyone the same regardless of where their parents or grandparents were educated, their race, religion or how much money they have. Justice means that all people must be treated fairly. No group or person should be favored. It might not always be true that students who benefit from affirmative action lack the academic credentials, but it is often interpreted as less qualified people taking the spots of qualified students.

The question about Michigan universities use of a “legacy” preference to give children of alumni an advantage in admission was considered in the case of Grutter v. Bollinger, No. 02-241(2003). Grutter, a white Michigan resident, filed a law suit alleging that the University of Michigan discriminated against her on the basis of race in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and U.S.C §1981. In this lawsuit, the so-called “legacy preference” to give the children of alumni an advantage in admissions was discussed. Justice Clarence Thomas mentions that legacy is one of the legal but “unseemly” considerations made when selecting students. The fact that he calls the practice “unseemly” acknowledges that this practice is unfair. This kind of environment and setting make even the bravest individual feel panicked as they encounter sudden defeat during their admission process.

In conclusion, while respecting the tradition of a university policy of using legacy programs regarding admission, this policy is a two-edged sword that puts tradition against equality and justice. Our Constitution is blind to family history and wealth, and so the university admission must be. It would be great if Michigan universities see it from this perspective and provide equal opportunity to all applicants.