Diversity at MIT

By Eun J. Lee

President Charles M. Vest discusses MIT's commitment to keeping race as a factor in college admissions.

TT: Why does MIT feel that affirmative action is still necessary, and what will have to happen to it for it to be phased out?

Vest: This is a topic where it's hard to be succinct, but let me try to be. The very term "affirmative action" is sort of a flash point because everybody carries its own definition and its own vision of what it means and how it operates. I think a lot of people have the idea of having to accept 15 percent or so of that group. We don't want to rob people of their identities, and race and culture and ethnic status and whether you're from a big city or a little town -- all these things are important components of who those students are and what they have to offer and what advantages they've had or haven't had in the way of overcoming Risk-taking and demonstrable passion for particular intellectual pursuits, all of these things we try to take into account as we read the cases and decide who we'll actually offer admissions to.

One of the other points that we will make in our brief is that one of the most fundamental academic decisions a faculty makes is who should study in their university, and we don't believe that it's appropriate for the federal government to take all of these important factors that define people and remove one of them and say, "You can consider everything but you can't consider this." So that's why we do these things. And if one wants to use the term affirmative action for that, so be it, but we think race consciousness along with conscious attention to factors that are important to attempt to do and what we do, I think, do pretty darn well.

Race continues to matter in America. We all wish that weren't the case, but it is. I don't know how to answer the question "when will this end." I think we know when we've finally arrived at that point, but what I can't accept is people just pretending that we haven't arrived at that point and that we can now neglect it, because I don't believe we can.

TT: Some opponents of affirmative action argue that it's wrong because it causes "reverse racism," and that people who are not minorities are put at a disadvantage. Do you feel that is the case with the students and the faculty that it offers admissions to?

Vest: Fact is that when you array this whole pool of thousands of young men and women who apply to [colleges], you are really trying to judge them as individuals and under all of these characteristics. Now if you want to build a class that has reasonable [geographic] representation, and you want to have some reasonable distribution of race in the pool, then by definition you are going to have one or more of those characteristics. So if meets one of those criteria will be admitted is going to be higher than the probability of an individual who does not meet one of these criteria -- just because you have a large pool defining the others. The real point is that [admissions are] subjective. We don't feel that we have the answer to that. We don't assign points, but those are factors that we think about and think if you were to look at the whole structure of a class, you would see that they are very diverse in this broad set of things.

The Tech: What is MIT doing in response to tighter restrictions post-Sept. 11 in support of its international scholars?

President Charles M. Vest: I'd like to divide this question. We'll think of it as local and global. Locally, we have tried to do several things. One is to be sure that our international students are concerned that we as an institution care about them and are concerned. On a practical level, we tried to make sure that much more accurate information be available to them through their international students and foreign scholars office.

... Many people have been just working simply to get their facts out and make sure that people understand their rights.... If anybody comes to any of the interviews is treated in a way that they believe is not appropriate, they should let us know. So we're trying to be helpful. We also try to raise awareness. We had a number of meetings of graduate students. Not only graduate international students, but all of graduate students, because we want people to be aware, be concerned and understand that we are there to support them.

More globally, we have tried to state as clearly as and as frequently as we could what we believe the underlying issues to be, in both the immediate concerns of our campus and foreign students and scholars but also to the important issues of importance of science and diversity in American society. There have been two particular mechanisms for doing that. This is one. My annual president's report was on the topic of openness this year. Section 10.4 of a very important report from the committee chaired by professor Sheila Widnall looking at the issue of openness and security on our campus in terms of scientific information and in particular the role of classification that we should not be classified research on our campus. Interestingly, that group was concerned about MIT, too. I think it turns out to be even more relevant and more timely than we had anticipated.

TT: Some documents have been well circulated in Washington. I have written two pieces, one in the Times [on the Wall Street Journal], that addresses both pieces of this issue, both the scientific issues, the national security issues that are relevant to international scholars. Our basic belief is that it is the legitimate role of the United States government and particularly the Department of the Department to decide who is granted a visa to enter the country, but once students are in the country, and on our campus, we want the campus experience to be the same for them as it is for all other students.

That's the separation that we are trying to very hard to maintain. We've all spent a lot of time in Washington deciding how to influence the administration, talking to people in Congress, talking to Congressional staffers, trying to get our perspective out there. We want to do all of this so we can get to know people to see both sides of these issues. The problem is that the scientific community has one view of the world and the community and the Department of Justice and so forth and we believe that security has another. It's really trying to maintain a respectful dialogue between these two things, very, very important. I believe that we and the whole higher education community have a lot of positive set in terms of the continued openness toward foreign students.

I think things might have been much worse. It is not by any very concerted efforts across colleges and universities. The issue now is going to revolve around an even more complicated issue, which is in the definition of so called "sensitive but unclassified information" -- the parts of the [USA] PATRIOT Act of 2001 that has been the Presidential Decision Directive back in October 2001 that talked about limiting access to certain international students to what they call "sensitive areas of study.

This is the most complicated and dangerous issue is all of this is going to be how the government defines and deals with that term. So far, I think they are taking a lot of time, but I don't think it's up to me to say that one group can't spend more of its time socializing with the other or what have you. ... [Israel] is not something that you -- you create opportunity -- you just literally over the weekend look at the results of our freshmen survey and their senior surveys over the last seven years, and the fact is that the vast majority of our students and also our alumni cite the experience of living and learning with people who are different from themselves as one of the important aspects of our experience at MIT, so I believe that diversity is valued. I believe that when I say that, that's what I mean. We want our students to see everything and it is an important part of what we are and who we are.
Subjective Decisions in Admissions

By Brian Loux
ASSOCIATE FEATURE EDITOR

One of the more prominent features in Dean of Admissions Marilee Jones's office is a large rectangular grid on a blackboard. The chalk-etched grid appears to have been created before our time and then left untouched for others to use upon. On the bottom and the left sides of the grid are two separate one-to-five scales labeled A.I. and P.R., respectively.

"The bottom one is for academic index," Jones says. "Our pool is so strong that the majority of selected students fall on 3.5 or higher, including minority students." The vertical index, on the other hand, stands for personal rating. Jones explains, "The dimensions are co-eccentric, such as math team, extra-curricular, and social skills."

MIT committed to affirmative action

To many, it hardly sounds like a program associated with affirmative action at all. MIT's affirmative action plan policy from 2001-2002 states that "It will be our goal to increase the numbers of women and members of minority groups within our undergraduate and graduate student bodies. . . . Our immediate efforts must concentrate on enlarging the pool of qualified women and minority applicants from which we admit students."

"Affirmative action means going out and bending over backwards and finding the best students of a population and get them to apply when they normally wouldn't," Jones said. Some students "don't come from a population that says, 'You're going to MIT.' It's not expected of them." Most Admissions Office activities center around searching through communities that seldom apply to elite schools to find and encourage stand-outs to apply to MIT.

But is there anything in MIT's admissions process that might effect a criteria? Probably. Within the realm of the subjective personal rating, one's socio-economic background undoubtedly comes into play. Jones relates the story of a student whose parents were migrant workers out west, a star student at a poor high school. Recruiters took interest in the student's invention of a portable solar-powered chili cooker for migrant workers to use in the field for lunch. The student was offered admission to MIT. "If we were to find a student from New York who developed a similar chili cooker in his basement, that probably wouldn't qualify him. [The first student] did something that was much more important in his community."

MIT vs. other schools

Regardless, the MIT system is in stark contrast with other schools' policies towards minorities. The University of Michigan, recently in the media spotlight for President George W. Bush's criticism of the school's hiring practices and two upcoming Supreme Court cases that will review them, underwrites a detailed "point system," in which one may earn numerative values for personal factors such as income, race, or gender to accumulate towards a sum needed for admission. At Michigan, 46 of 130 points can be attained through non-academic qualities.

"The concept of a plus factor is for public schools," says Jones. "State schools have a duty to educate their own population, including the destitute, which is why some of them have quotas." MIT, on the other hand, strives to attract "star students at a poor high school." Some applicants "don't come from a population that says, 'You're going to MIT.' It's not expected of them."

"I am not qualified as an admissions officer, but considering the level of subjectivity involved, a change in administrative officers followed by a huge percentage increase in any area would appear to have come from a bias or tendency of some kind," he said. "A gradual increase would be a different story because you could argue that the quality of minority applicants has improved over time, but not a huge increase such as four percent." Jones disagreed. "I doubt [there is a quota]. Underrepresented minorities are still underrepresented," he said. "Hispanics make up 13 percent of the U.S. and only 11 percent of MIT. For blacks, it's 12 percent and six percent. If they do have a quota, it's not a very good one."

MIT will stand with U. Michigan

Though MIT's practices have drawn little national attention, it will stand with the University of Michigan in the upcoming Supreme Court cases. MIT is planning to submit an Amicus Curiae — "Friend of the court" — brief focusing on the importance of diversity in science, engineering, and industry. "Amicus Curiae briefs are submitted by policy makers that parties that think the court should be heard of," said senior counsel member Jaime Lewis Keith. "MIT is presenting as argument in the context of the law that applies today. . . . Many examples currently have to do with law or medical school, focusing on the importance of diversity in science and technology."

The two cases both came down from the 6th U.S. Court of Appeals against the President of the University of Lone Bollinger. Grover v. Bollinger contests the policies of Michigan's graduate law program while Gratz and Gratz v. Bollinger contests the admissions practices for undergraduate students. "Our statement will be in support of the value of diversity," Keith said. "In a world where it is increasingly diverse, it is important they receive their education in an environment that is diverse." MIT is working with the office of Jones Day and the Dean for Undergraduate Recruitment to help draft the brief, Keith said.

Sources say President Charles M. Vest will make an official announcement about the introduction of the brief.

Jones hopes that affirmative action as we know it will be preserved. "I have strong feelings that if the [court] is going to figure out how to succeed at MIT, she said. "I would question whether or not you would have a worse experience. That is its power."

Vest, Clay Remain Committed

Minorities, from Page 1

The complaint against MIT was made several months ago and asserted that the programs were racially exclusive. Clay said, stressing that there had been no formal governmental investigation as a result.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits some discriminatory practices at institutions that receive federal money. Neither MITES nor Interphase receives federal money directly, but because MIT receives federal money, the programs fall under the law's purview.

Clay said he was unaware of the details of the complaint since it came to MIT through the Department of Education's Civil Rights office.

The BSU first formulated interphase in 1969. The program invites fifty underrepresented minority students to campus for eight weeks of rigorous academics and an introduction to the Boston area.

MITES, a similar program for about fifty minority high-schoolers, sends about thirty percent of its students to MIT; formerly MITES director William H. Ramsey '51 said in interview his "number one goal was to show that Dae J. Lee contributed to the reporting of this story."
The American Dream is Still Just a Dream for Most Minorities

By Philip M. Deitsch

America is the land of opportunity. It's hard work enough, I can be whatever I want to be. If I truly believe I can get it, I will work hard and grow up to be whatever it is that makes me happy. The sky is the limit.

These statements portray the American Dream. We can all remember hearing these messages in preschool, kindergarten, and even elementary school. Some point in our childhood, but now they seem more comical. If you still actually believe them, then you are either beardless or a wealthy white man. Since 1940, America has added reasonable classes to the American dream, and listen to those who are poor.

The American dream seems more difficult to attain when the American dreaming is a member of a minority group in poverty. This is not to say that the dream of success and money — they are not the same thing — is impossible for certain people. It is just incredibly more difficult to achieve when one is faced with certain obstacles. One is not always in the majority.

The truth about American society is not pretty, and the facts prove it. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, blacks are as likely to be poor compared to other races, and the problem for blacks is more acute for the country. Blacks are also three times more likely to be convicted of drug violations than whites. Only 7% of blacks, compared to 19% of whites, received passing grades in public school education, compared to 85% of whites. This is not to say blacks are on average less money than whites. Regardless, even if we had the solution to poverty, we would still have to somehow face the problem. Who gets the prize and who does not?

What are the racial problems that exist today? Well, racism is not an strikingly obvious problem, but unfortunately it still is very plentiful. Have you heard of your classmates telling you that the majority of people pulled over by police-initiated action (e.g., detainment, arrest) are black or a wealthy white man. Turban-wearing Sikhs have been especially discriminated against since the attacks. Does it surprise you that this was the case for blacks versus whites. Blacks were also three times more likely to be poor compared to other races, and the problem for blacks is more acute for the country. Blacks are also three times more likely to be convicted of drug violations than whites. Only 7% of blacks, compared to 19% of whites, received passing grades in public school education, compared to 85% of whites. This is not to say blacks are on average less money than whites. Regardless, even if we had the solution to poverty, we would still have to somehow face the problem. Who gets the prize and who does not?

Affirmative action will never fully counteract the racism and stereotyping that exists in society. However, it does, and will continue to, produce culturally aware campuses, which in turn produce culturally aware people.

Racial Profiling: Justice for All?

By Ajay Bhaddaraw

Growing up in an all-black suburb of Milwaukee, the second most segregated city in the United States, I always felt a little different. I still recall the fact that I was an all-white school of 800, the only Indian. Some of my classmates thought I was an Arab. I was an all-white school of 800, the only Indian. Some of my classmates thought I was an Arab. I was an all-white school of 800, the only Indian. Some of my classmates thought I was an Arab. I was an all-white school of 800, the only Indian. Some of my classmates thought I was an Arab.

The law enforcement community has been put in the spotlight recently due to such “racial profiling.” I have been detained at airport security and I would sarcastically comment, “Oh, they have black hair, why should it automatically mean that the majority of people pulled over by police-initiated action (e.g., detainment, arrest) are black or a wealthy white man. Turban-wearing Sikhs have been especially discriminated against since the attacks. Does it surprise you that this was the case for blacks versus whites. Blacks were also three times more likely to be poor compared to other races, and the problem for blacks is more acute for the country. Blacks are also three times more likely to be convicted of drug violations than whites. Only 7% of blacks, compared to 19% of whites, received passing grades in public school education, compared to 85% of whites. This is not to say blacks are on average less money than whites. Regardless, even if we had the solution to poverty, we would still have to somehow face the problem. Who gets the prize and who does not?

There are 11 black students on campus, and all but one of them are black. When police pull over a car, they often react with suspicion to the driver. Even my classmates thought I was a terrorist. I have been detained at airport security and I would sarcastically comment, “Oh, they have black hair, why should it automatically mean that the majority of people pulled over by police-initiated action (e.g., detainment, arrest) are black or a wealthy white man. Turban-wearing Sikhs have been especially discriminated against since the attacks. Does it surprise you that this was the case for blacks versus whites. Blacks were also three times more likely to be poor compared to other races, and the problem for blacks is more acute for the country. Blacks are also three times more likely to be convicted of drug violations than whites. Only 7% of blacks, compared to 19% of whites, received passing grades in public school education, compared to 85% of whites. This is not to say blacks are on average less money than whites. Regardless, even if we had the solution to poverty, we would still have to somehow face the problem. Who gets the prize and who does not?

I have been detained at airport security checkpoints numerous times since 9/11 ... Just because my skin is brown and I have black hair, why should it automatically be assumed that I am more likely to be an international terrorist?

In the all-black suburb of Milwaukee, the second most segregated city in the United States, I always felt a little different. I still recall the fact that I was an all-white school of 800, the only Indian. Some of my classmates thought I was an Arab. I was an all-white school of 800, the only Indian. Some of my classmates thought I was an Arab. I was an all-white school of 800, the only Indian. Some of my classmates thought I was an Arab. I was an all-white school of 800, the only Indian. Some of my classmates thought I was an Arab.

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When Should Race Matter in Decisions?

By Ken Neumark

"I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character," said Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in his now famous speech. That particular line has been the source of much controversy.

Conservatives cite it to align King's legacy with their own opposition to affirmative action and racial preferences, causing proponents of the cause to work in vain to wrest and silence from those words the apparent denunciation of any discrimination based on race. King himself, however, represents King's beliefs; towards the end of his life, he became so embittered and disillusioned by the fight against segregation of resources and opportunities in society. However, this line, as well as King's life in work, presents the question of what use we made of race as a criterion in making decisions.

Answering that question brings us to analyze exactly the usage of race as a criterion means and necessitates for different decision-makers.

Clearly, there is no single appropriate guideline for the use of race as such a criterion. The criterion is one of deciding who should be allowed to use a bathroom, sit at a lunch counter, or shop at a store, employing race as a criterion is quite difficult to justify.

For the most part, such open discrimination, which is the persecution of individuals fighting for civil rights more decades ago, faces unfairness of violent and hateful opposition. While inequality still exists, it is no longer a product of a formal set of rules designed to keep an entire race in a subservient role. Affirmative action, however, is a formal set of rules appropriately employing race as a criterion. It has served as a tool to rectify the problem of resource allocation. Consider two realities in which affirmative action is used: colleges and employers. Colleges and employers each have a limited amount of resources to distribute among their students and employees. The institutions are administered and operated by different people, which means that students of different races are selected who should or not be able to partake in daily social lives, selecting who should be allowed to use a bathroom, sit at a lunch counter, or shop at a store, employing race as a criterion is quite difficult to justify.

Once admitted to a course, the choice of selecting individuals with unique talents becomes an acknowledgement that such individuals have been born to their parents—nothing more. (Legacy admissions do the same thing.)

Just how much advantage does being black confer? A study cited in the Wall Street Journal found that otherwise equally qualified whites and African Americans go to law school 247 times less likely to be admitted than black applicants.

Some complaint minorities are underrepresented on campus. Equating this fact with aggressive discrimination completely ignores cultural differences of achievement and education. While varied representation clearly doesn't prove discrimination or even strongly suggest it, recruiters can take other approaches to addressing low minority enrollment. Taking the top few percent of every high school's graduating class is one such approach; doing so will yield indistinguishable results in most environments rather than simply rewarding members of a certain race.

Race is an appropriate criterion for selecting individuals for positions that need to be awarded on the basis of racial heritage or race does not determine merit. However, race obviously does serve at the least a visual identification for the public to know and enforce the law, law's agents must make use of every identification tool available, including race. Racial profiling is, in any case, not uniformly strong, it is entirely appropriate to make use of race, as it is any other identifier, to make law enforcement decisions.

Security policies after Sept. 11 highlight this point. The government has invested resources with which to defend against terrorism and preserve our security. We know that those most likely to commit a crime is higher, devoting more resources towards scrutinizing that race is simply the best identifier to prove our lack of prejudice, leading to high-visible searches of elderly women's wheelchairs as they board airplanes, or do we simply pay attention to those who likely pose the greatest threat?

More generally, if you know that the probability that individuals of a particular race will commit a crime is higher, devoting more resources towards scrutinizing that race is simply the best identifier. Problems arise when undue scrutiny is given not because of a threat posed by a race but merely because of prejudice. This does happen today, and it's a problem. Racial profiling, though, certainly has a negative impact for citizens that their hard work has borne fruit, that their hard work has been recognized. This line does not comprehensively represent King's beliefs; towards the end of his life's work in part, raises the question of what use we made of race as a criterion in making decisions.

King and President John F. Kennedy assassinated.

1968- Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday
1969- Student Homophile League
1970- MIT allows coed dormitories.
1971- Twelve percent of MIT's freshmen are in the lowest national quarter of finalists.
1972- Little more than three percent of MIT's graduate population is from American minority groups.
1974- National Society of Black Engineers-MIT established.
1975- Martin Luther King Jr. named first black chair of MIT Corporation.
1976- First National Chicano Youth Opportunity Program.
1978- First National Chicano Youth Opportunity Program.
1979- Sheila W. Warden '60 becomes first black elected chair of MIT faculty.
1980- First Black Student Center established.
1986- Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday

The government has limited the population, no more than we would expect perfect equality among any refinement of the population, no more than we would expect a desire to raise our homogenous population of millions of individuals. We can strive for equality of opportunity, but affirmative action does not provide that equality of opportunity. Attempts to reform it are representations by the same political groups who defend affirmative action. King sought for his children not just to be like their race, but to be different from it. A colorencient society is about as infeasible as an outright black society, we should be very careful what formula we make of our society, for the future. While we do use race as a tool of judgment, rewarding individuals based on race rather than ability and merit is not a legitimate way to make such judgment. Using skin color as a tool of identification is racist.

Pursuing these two policies where Dr. King delivers his famous "I Have a Dream" speech. He said, "I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation which will be truly great." This line does not comprehensively represent King's beliefs; towards the end of his life's work in part, raises the question of what use we made of race as a criterion in making decisions.

Viewpoint

How should one rate race relations at MIT on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is poorest and 5 is completely harmonious?

Mike Friedman, Electrical Engineering

"It's a 4. I haven't noticed major problems. There is a lot of diversity on campus of which I've taken advantage, and so I'm happy with it. There is, however, segregation in housing, and I think the first year should be randomized."

Shahar M. Hussam '03

How would you rate race relations in the United States as a whole?

"It's a 2. The only reason it's not a 1 is because it's clearly not as bad as in other areas. While the integration of schools is in progress, there are still places that have white races. I just saw a news report that showed, in certain areas, the racial integration of blacks is the same as it was fifty years ago."

Adam B. Glassman G

Compiled by Melissa A. Edoh
The MIT report, titled "Diversity in Action: Faculty Diversification," highlights the initiatives and statistics on faculty diversity at MIT over the years. It begins with an introduction to the case of financial aid and minority students at MIT, acknowledging the challenges faced by underrepresented students. The report mentions the establishment of the Office of Minority Education (OME) in 1991 to develop a minority faculty initiative, which awards departmental slots to under-represented minorities to the MIT faculty. The report notes that the percentage of women in their respective departments is almost even, and the number of women faculty members has increased from 106 to 154 over the same period. However, the report also mentions a need to give special attention to these students, as there have been improvements, but it's still not done a good job to feed the interests of women.

In 1992, MIT implemented a minority faculty hiring initiative, which awards departmental slots to under-represented minorities to the MIT faculty. The report states that the MLK program has made noticeable achievements in achieving this goal. Through an array of programs, MIT has increased the number of women faculty members from 35 in 1993 to 43 in 2002 while the faculty not work-Ing in Science and Engineering has increased from 25% in 1998 to 30% in 2002. The report also mentions the importance of having a diverse faculty and highlights the need for more women and minority faculty members in academic leadership positions, developing guidelines for the undergraduate class is almost even, and the number of women faculty members has increased from 106 to 154 over the same period. However, the report also mentions that it's still not done a good job to feed the interests of women.

In 1994, MIT announced Robert Taylor as the first African-American awarded tenure to its African-American awarded tenure. The report states that in 1995, MIT awarded tenure to its first African-American awarded tenure. The statistics for minority and women faculty members are as follows: 30% for minority faculty and 74% for total faculty were women.

In 1998, the report noted that 90 percent of the MIT's tenured faculty and 74 percent of the total faculty were women. The report states that the number of women faculty members has increased from 35 in 1993 to 43 in 2002 while the faculty not working in Science and Engineering has increased from 25% in 1998 to 30% in 2002. The report also mentions the importance of having a diverse faculty and highlights the need for more women and minority faculty members in academic leadership positions, developing guidelines for the undergraduate class is almost even, and the number of women faculty members has increased from 106 to 154 over the same period. However, the report also mentions that it's still not done a good job to feed the interests of women.

The report also added that tenured women tend to feel marginalized and excluded from leadership positions within their departments and on important committees. The report states that the number of women faculty members has increased from 35 in 1993 to 43 in 2002 while the faculty not working in Science and Engineering has increased from 25% in 1998 to 30% in 2002. The report also mentions the importance of having a diverse faculty and highlights the need for more women and minority faculty members in academic leadership positions, developing guidelines for the undergraduate class is almost even, and the number of women faculty members has increased from 106 to 154 over the same period. However, the report also mentions that it's still not done a good job to feed the interests of women.

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