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## **Under SAT-Only Admissions, Asian American Applicants to Selective Colleges Would Gain Fewer than 3,000 Seats Out of 120,000, Georgetown University Report Finds**

*21% of Asian American students at the most selective colleges would not have been admitted under a test-only admissions policy*

**(Washington, DC, July 15, 2021)** A new report from the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce (CEW) finds no strong evidence of discrimination against Asian American applicants in admissions to highly selective colleges. *Selective Bias: Asian Americans, Test Scores, and Holistic Admissions* evaluates the common arguments made by affirmative action critics and Students for Fair Admissions, which is suing Harvard University and has lawsuits pending against the University of North Carolina and the University of Texas at Austin over their admissions practices.

Asian American applicants face lower acceptance rates at highly selective colleges compared to other racial and ethnic groups, but they are also much more likely to apply regardless of test scores. Even if standardized test scores were the only factor considered in admissions, the Asian American share of enrollment at selective colleges would increase by no more than 2 percentage points. The data do not support the claim that selective colleges adjust the number of Asian American students they admit to maintain a long-term racial balance of students.

“If we used test-based merit as the singular admissions requirement, the gain for Asian American applicants would be marginal,” CEW Director and lead author Anthony P. Carnevale said. “But on the flip side, 21% of Asian American applicants who were previously admitted would no longer qualify.”

Critics of affirmative action point to the stable enrollment share of Asian American students at the most selective colleges for the past two decades as evidence that these institutions maintain a predetermined racial balance of students. However, CEW researchers found that the enrollment share of Asian American and Pacific Islander students at Harvard and at the 90 other most selective colleges in the US has kept pace with their growing share of the four-year college-going population. In fact, the Asian American and Pacific Islander share of enrollments at the most selective colleges grew by 4 percentage points even while their enrollment share at all four-year colleges grew by just 2 percentage points between 1999 and 2018.

The likelihood of attending Harvard has declined at the same rate for Asian American and Pacific Islander four-year college students as for college students of all other racial and ethnic groups between 2000 and 2018. The number of seats at Harvard is relatively stable, so if Asian American and Pacific Islander applicants were being disproportionately excluded from Harvard as their total enrollment at four-year colleges doubled, their chances of attending Harvard would decrease more quickly than those of the general population. But that has not happened.

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Another criticism of selective colleges' admissions practices is that they reject Asian American applicants in greater numbers than students from other racial and ethnic groups. However, CEW researchers found that Asian American students are more likely to apply to highly selective colleges, regardless of their test scores. Among students who scored 1300 or above on the SAT, 65% of Asian American students applied to one of the most selective colleges in the country, compared to 50% of non-Asian American students. And among students who scored below 1300, 12% of Asian American students took a chance and applied to one of the most selective colleges, compared to only 5% of non-Asian American students. Since more Asian American students apply to selective colleges, more are denied a seat.

To test the claim that Asian American applicants need to get a higher score on the SAT than applicants from other racial and ethnic groups to gain admission to highly selective colleges, CEW researchers simulated how using standardized test scores as the sole factor in admissions would change an admitted class. The thought experiment showed that median scores for students admitted to the most selective colleges would increase by 70 points for Asian Americans and 90 points for non-Asian Americans under a test-only admissions policy.

Overall, in a test-only admissions system, Asian American college applicants would gain fewer than 3,000 seats at the most selective colleges, compared to the nearly 14,500 seats they typically capture in an admissions year. The share of Asian American high school students in a class attending these colleges would increase from 12% to 14%.

Asian American students admitted under a test-only policy would still have higher test scores, on average, than non-Asian American students.

“The holistic admissions system generally seems to benefit many Asian American applicants,” CEW Senior Analyst and report co-author Michael C. Quinn said.

#### Other Key Findings:

- The proportion of Asian American and Pacific Islander students at Harvard grew from 22% in 1999 to 24% in 2018.
- At the most selective colleges, the proportion of Asian American and Pacific Islander students grew from 14% in 1999 to 18% in 2018.
- Asian American and Pacific Islander students hold 18% of all seats at the country's most selective colleges but make up only 6% of the college-going population.
- The share of college students who hold SAT scores above 1350 who are Asian American and Pacific Islander remained consistent at 12% in 2000, 2008, and 2012.
- In 2016, Asian American and Pacific Islander college students held 15% of all SAT scores above 1350, and their share of seats at the most selective colleges changed commensurately.

To view the full report, visit [cew.georgetown.edu/selectivebias](http://cew.georgetown.edu/selectivebias).

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