

## **Average Student Has Better Chance (77%) of Graduating at Selective Universities Compared to Open Access Schools (51%), Georgetown University Analysis Finds**

*Empirical evidence refutes “mismatch” concept at play in the Supreme Court Fisher vs. University of Texas affirmative action case*

**(Washington, D.C., June 21, 2016)** The theory that an average student, including minority students, will be overmatched at a selective university and will do poorly is empirically unsound, according to a new analysis from the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce (Georgetown Center). In fact, all students with above average test scores will succeed at a higher rate at selective colleges than open-admission colleges.

As the U.S. Supreme Court prepares to decide this month on its latest affirmative action case (Fisher vs. University of Texas at Austin), justices have focused attention on the theory of “mismatch” that says college students will perform best at schools with students more like themselves. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas expressed those thoughts in his dissent to the 2003 decision in Grutter v. Bollinger saying: “The Law School tantalizes unprepared students with the promise of a University of Michigan degree and all of the opportunities that it offers. These overmatched students take the bait, only to find that they cannot succeed in the cauldron of competition.”

“We’re holding qualified students back, particularly minorities, saying they can’t succeed when in reality, they indeed can,” said Anthony P. Carnevale, director of the Georgetown Center.

The Georgetown Center analyzed nationally representative data to demonstrate that the mismatch theory is wrong. The analysis shows that placing average students in the nation’s best colleges and universities will increase their rate of graduation by 26 percent.

“The data shows that three times more students are qualified to attend the top 468 universities than actually go to them,” said Jeff Strohl, director of research at the Georgetown Center.

### **The Facts**

- The average student (scoring around 1000 on the SAT) will have a 77 percent chance of graduating when attending one of the top 468 universities in the country — a 26 percentage point increase over the expected graduation rate when they attend open access schools, where the average SAT score is below 900.
- Lower scoring African Americans and Hispanics — many from low income backgrounds — do in fact fare much better when placed in academically challenging environments, even when other students are predominantly white (75 percent), and affluent (56 percent of students come from the nation’s wealthiest families).

- Students of varied races perform almost equally. White students in the bottom half of test scores have a graduation rate of 75 percent at the most selective colleges and universities, and those in the top half of test scores graduate at a rate of 88 percent.
- For minority students, the graduation rate is 73 percent for those from the bottom half of test score and 85 percent for those in the top half of the test distribution.
- Students at selective universities from the lowest test quartile have a higher graduation rate (68 percent) than do students from the top test quartile who attend open-access institutions (59 percent).

“The misconstrued belief that students with low test scores won’t succeed leaves behind half a million high school students every year who graduate in the upper half of their high school class but do not graduate from college,” said Jeff Strohl, director of research at the Georgetown Center. “And nearly half are minority students who would have been successful at selective institutions.”

**Table 1: A low-scoring but wealthy student graduates at the same rate (60%) as a poor student in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quartile of test performance (61%).**

	Socioeconomic Status Quartiles (Family Background)			
Sat/ACT quartiles	Low	2	3	High
Low	44%	49%	46%	60%
2	47%	55%	59%	70%
3	61%	57%	67%	75%
High	71%	67%	80%	83%

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of ELS 2002-12, NCES-Barron's Admissions Competitiveness Index Data Files: 1972, 1982, 1992, 2004, 2008

**Table 2: Selectivity increases graduation rates more than test scores**

SAT/ACT Quartiles	Most Competitive 468 Institutions	Moderately Competitive	Open Access
All	85%	73%	51%
Low	68%	54%	47%
2	77%	73%	51%
3	82%	75%	55%
High	89%	83%	59%

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of ELS 2002-12, NCES-Barron's Admissions Competitiveness Index Data Files: 1972, 1982, 1992, 2004, 2008

**Table 3: Minorities and whites alike do well in selective universities. Test score does not significantly mitigate the downward graduation rate effect in low resourced open access institutions.**

	Race	All	Most Competitive 468 Institutions	Moderately Competitive	Open Access
	All	62%	85%	73%	51%
	White	66%	86%	77%	55%
	Black and Hispanic	51%	81%	61%	46%
SAT/ACT					
Below 1000	White	57%	75%	71%	52%
Above 1000		74%	88%	80%	59%
SAT/ACT					
Below 1000	Black and Hispanic	48%	73%	58%	45%
Above 1000		61%	85%	67%	49%

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of ELS 2002-12, NCES-Barron's Admissions Competitiveness Index Data Files: 1972, 1982, 1992, 2004, 2008

The Fisher vs. University of Texas case stems from a law enacted in 1997 requiring the University of Texas to admit all high school seniors who ranked in the top ten percent of their classes and a later modification that allowed for considering race as a factor in admission for all other applicants. Abigail Fisher, a white female who was not in the top ten percent of her class, applied for undergraduate admission in 2008 and was denied. A judge denied Fisher's claim that affirmative action violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, but an appellate court overturned that ruling. The appeal later reached the Supreme Court, which is expected to issue a ruling later this month.

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The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce is an independent, nonprofit research and policy institute affiliated with the Georgetown McCourt School of Public Policy that studies the link between education, career qualifications, and workforce demands. For more information, visit: [cew.georgetown.edu](http://cew.georgetown.edu). Follow us on Twitter [@GeorgetownCEW](https://twitter.com/GeorgetownCEW), on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/GeorgetownCEW), and [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/GeorgetownCEW).