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An Equal Opportunity Rejection

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An Equal Opportunity Rejection

Abstract

Let's talk about applications. We've all been there. You write your application, work on draft after draft and then you send it all off to the college or job of your dreams. And you wait... and wait... and wait. You wait for some sort of letter or phone call that says something along the lines of, "We love you! You're awesome, and smart and special, and we think you'd be a great asset!" And maybe you're lucky and you *do* get that letter, but let's be real - that doesn't always happen. It can be frustrating to receive a rejection letter (or nothing at all), because in all honesty, who wants to be told that they're "not good enough"? Not me. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, college applications, college admissions, rejection letter, equal opportunity, minority students, affirmative action

Disciplines

Education | Educational Sociology | Higher Education | Liberal Studies | School Psychology

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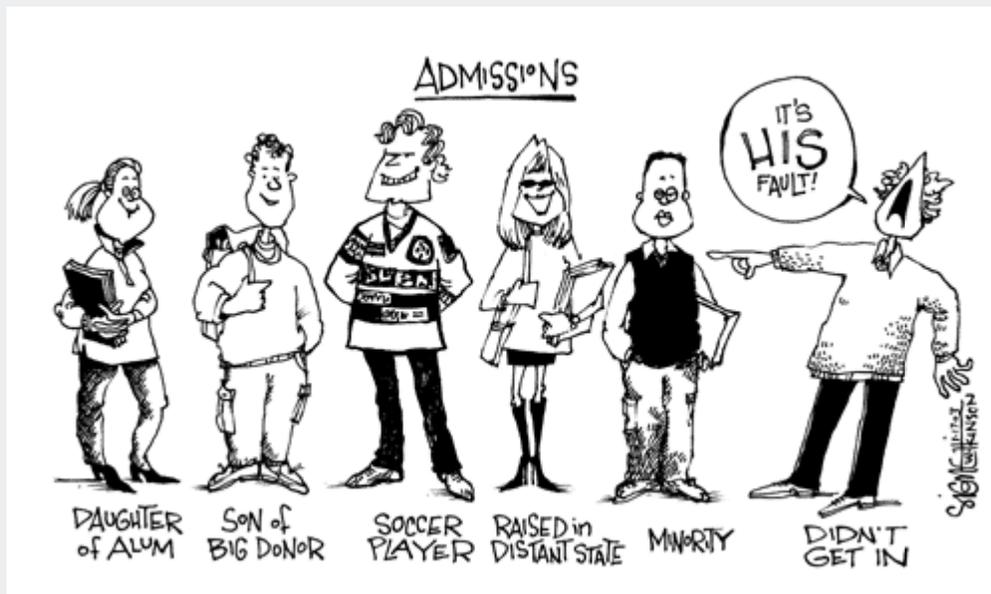
Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](#) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at surgegettysburg.wordpress.com Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that -isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY REJECTION

May 13, 2013



Let's talk about applications. We've all been there. You write your application, work on draft after draft and then you send it all off to the college or job of your dreams. And you wait...and wait...and wait. You wait for some sort of letter or phone call that says something along the lines of, "We love you! You're awesome, and smart and special, and we think you'd be a great asset!" And maybe you're lucky and you *do* get that letter, but let's be real—that doesn't always happen. It can be frustrating to receive a rejection letter (or nothing at all), because in all honesty, who wants to be told that they're "not good enough"? Not me.

And neither does Suzy Lee Weiss, a student who recently received a lot of press for an article that she had published in the Wall Street Journal [expressing her frustrations](#) about not getting into the college of her dreams. I mean, I get some of her frustrations. It stinks to get rejected from anyone, and especially college. But I take issue with her slam on affirmative action. She writes, "I offer about as much diversity as a saltine cracker. If it were up to me, I would've been any of the diversities: Navajo, Pacific Islander, anything. Sen. Elizabeth Warren, I salute you and your 1/32 Cherokee heritage." Suzy Lee isn't the only person that feels this way. Abigail Fisher went all the

way to the Supreme Court with her [complaint](#) that her place at the University of Texas at Austin was given to a minority student.

I've been hearing this from my peers, too, especially those about to graduate. Some of them have mentioned that they'd gladly assume minority status in order to reap the perceived benefits. One recently said that "the people who really gets the shaft thanks to affirmative action are white men." Are you *kidding* me? Women represent roughly half of the world population, and yet in 2012 people were celebrating because the number of female CEOs on the Fortune 500 list was 18. I don't see any white men getting "the shaft" there.

Here's the thing, affirmative action isn't about giving certain people an advantage over others. It's about leveling the playing field that's been knocked off balance by the institutionalized racism and sexism (and all kinds of other *-isms*) that are ingrained in our society. If you're not sure what I mean by this, let's look at the example that I think everyone on this college campus can understand: legacy. Everyone always talks about how it's not what you know, but who you know. Decisions about accepting students or offering jobs to candidates can be influenced by a phone call from a certain important person or the prestige of a specific last name. But how exactly is a first generation potential college student from underfunded public high school in a poor neighborhood going to find someone to make that phone call to Yale for him?

From this you might argue that affirmative action should be based on class instead of minority status, but race can play a significant role in determining a person's class. [One study](#) found that a job applicant with a "white sounding name" on their resume was twice as likely to get a phone call than one with a "black sounding name" and the exact same qualifications. It seems to me that a "black sounding name" isn't something that you adopt to get into college and then discard in order to find employment afterward. [This study](#) shows that a white male without a criminal record is also more likely to receive a second interview than an African American who had never been convicted of a crime.

Another argument against affirmative action is that while trying to help minorities, it actually harms them by placing them in situations for which they aren't qualified or prepared. Qualifications are subjective, though. If a board member thinks that a woman is "too emotional" to make tough business decisions as a CEO, or a black candidate "just won't fit into to the organizational culture," neither will have the opportunity to even try.

The very fact that Suzy Lee Weiss and so many other people think that they would receive preferential treatment if they could only assume the identity of a minority is a manifestation of the narrow reality that prevails as a result of white privilege. Kendra James at Racialicious [makes this point](#) humorously:

"Apparently brown babies are receiving their Ivy League acceptances stapled to birth certificates in the delivery rooms nowadays. You sign up for a lifetime of other systemic issues (Racism? Discrimination? No big), but hey, at least you're going to Harvard."

With racial and class privilege also comes a certain amount of arrogance. So often, essential things that many people struggle to obtain – like a good education – are handed to white folks. Many students– particularly those of color– don't have the privilege of knowing for certain that they will attend college, never mind expect to be admitted to their top choice.

All of this said, I do agree with girls like Abigail Fisher and Suzy Lee about one thing. I'd absolutely love to see the day where the government didn't have to legislate equality and everyone was accepted into schools and positions of employment based solely on their merits. But how do we get to that point?

One of the best answers that I've found is the one we've been hearing all year: diversity, equity, and inclusion. Stereotypes are most effectively broken down when people witness their inaccuracy first-hand. This means that measures of affirmative action that place people into positions in which they are traditionally underrepresented, are crucial to breaking down institutionalized discrimination and structural inequalities. These work together to prevent the existence of the color-blind meritocracy of which middle-class white kids, like me, all dream. So, sure, the system isn't perfect. But it's a start, and believe it or not, it benefits all of us.

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