

Diversity at the University of Georgia

The University of Georgia is the flagship institution of higher education in the state of Georgia. It has a duty to prepare its students to function effectively, to be leaders, and to be citizens of the state, region, and nation. Part of this duty is to prepare students to work in a diverse environment. This duty includes an obligation to expose students to a robust exchange of ideas within a student body representing the greatest possible variety of backgrounds. Such exposure is an essential part of our obligation to prepare students to interact in an increasingly diverse workforce and society, both domestically and internationally. In order to provide a diverse learning environment, the University will adopt policies and practices to increase diversity among its entering students.

The Dimensions of Diversity

Diversity encompasses the breadth of knowledge, skills and experiences in a student body. A broadly diverse learning environment benefits the whole university, both because students of differing cultural, racial, ethnic, and experiential backgrounds bring differing perspectives to the University community, and because alumni of such a learning environment gain greater legitimacy in the eyes of the citizenry of Georgia, the nation, and the world. As part of its duty to prepare students for the public and private sectors, the University of Georgia should ensure that the paths of leadership be open to all. The University of Georgia should seek to “assemb[le] a class that is both

exceptionally qualified and broadly diverse”.¹ Since AY 2002, the University reviews many applicants on an individualized basis, giving consideration to factors other than quantitative test scores, grades, and curriculum. That review should explicitly include contributions to diversity.

Elements of diversity that will be considered include, but are not limited to:

Racial and ethnic diversity.

The proportion of students of color (African American, Latino, Asian American and Native American) at the University of Georgia is small enough that those students are likely to be a “solo minority” or part of a very small group of students, particularly in the small non-lecture-format classes where their contributions to discussion are most valuable. As Gudeman has pointed out, research in social psychology has demonstrated that “A solo is more likely to be objectified and treated as a representative of a category than as a unique person.”²

Race neutral alternatives at the University of Georgia have failed to achieve the critical mass³ of racially and ethnically diverse students to

¹ *Grutter v Bollinger et al.* Respondents brief, as quoted. 539 U.S. 02-241 (2003)

² Gudeman, RH (2000). “College missions, faculty teaching, and student outcomes in a context of low diversity.” In *Does Diversity Make a Difference?* American Council on Education. p51.

³ The University of Michigan Law School noted in *Grutter v. Bollinger et al.* that “critical mass” is “not by any means a quota.”, and does “not envision or employ any numerical target of range of targets” (Respondents brief, pp5-6).

achieve a rich learning environment in our academic community.⁴ The University rejects quotas and other mechanical approaches that treat any single factor as a defining feature of an applicant's file. Nevertheless, it has a compelling interest in considering race and ethnicity as one among many factors in consideration for admission.

Geographic Diversity.

As the flagship and Land Grant institution of the University System of Georgia, the University of Georgia has a mission to support the economic development of the entire state. Our students therefore should be exposed to viewpoints from the entire state, not from any one geographic region.

Although our first priority is to educate the students of the state of Georgia, it is also important that University of Georgia students be exposed to perspectives from other parts of the nation and world.

The University will therefore include consideration of geographic diversity among factors considered in admissions decisions.

⁴ For example, the 2003 National Survey of Student Engagement, a national survey of freshmen and seniors at 437 colleges and universities conducted by Indiana University, found that University of Georgia respondents were less likely than those at similar universities to have a serious conversation with a person of another race or ethnicity. They were also "less positive than their counterparts on the question of whether their institution helps them understand people of other ethnic and racial backgrounds." (Dendy, LB, University of Georgia Press Release, October 22, 2003.)

Linguistic Diversity

Linguistic diversity is one measure of different cultural perspectives that contributes to the learning environment at the University of Georgia. The state of Georgia enjoys increasing linguistic diversity.⁵ However, in 2003, only 0.3% of incoming first-year students (including both international students and Georgia residents) reported that English was not their first language. In order to graduate culturally competent students, prepared to meet the demands of a changing state and world, the University will include linguistic diversity as a factor in admissions decisions.

Experiential Diversity

In today's society, the variety of life experiences is constantly expanding. The University should strive to enroll students with varying perspectives derived experientially from circumstances, challenges and opportunities. It would enhance the educational experience of all University students if the student body were to represent the broadest possible spectrum of socioeconomic backgrounds and a range of other qualities and experiences.⁶ Additionally, the educational environment is enhanced by

⁵ In the year 2000, over 750,000 Georgia respondents, age five and up, reported that language other than English was the primary language spoken at home (Georgia MapStats from FedStats). Languages reported included many African, Asian, and European languages. (U.S. Department of Education. "Survey of the States' Limited English Proficient Students and Available Education Programs and Services, 2000-2001.")

⁶ For example students who have been required to work to supplement the family income, who have the primary responsibility of caring for siblings, who have worked full-time, who have raised a family, or who have served in the military could bring a different perspective to the classroom. Still other students may

the participation and perspectives of students who have special talents in areas such as the fine and performing arts, debate, or athletics. Finally, some instructional programs could benefit from increased gender diversity.

This diversity of backgrounds and life experiences constitutes experiential diversity, and it is of benefit to the entire University community. For these reasons, experiential diversity in the student body will be sought after and valued by the University

Conclusion

In order to enhance diversity in the student body, the University of Georgia will engage in a “highly individualized, holistic review” of applicants’ files, and give “serious consideration to all the ways in which an applicant might contribute to a diverse educational environment.”⁷ No policy, either explicitly or implicitly, will lead to automatic acceptance or rejection based on the specific diversity considerations discussed above.

have had experiences including, but not limited to: a) living abroad for an extended period; b) growing up in a single-parent home, in foster care, or in another challenging family situation; c) facing difficult challenges due to their religious affiliation, sexual orientation, or gender identification or loss of a parent or sibling; or d) to overcoming sickness or disability.

⁷ *Grutter v Bollinger et al.* 539 U.S. 02-241 (2003) p 25.