“Diversity” may sound like a politically correct buzzword, but to those of us who work in universities, it is much more than that. Much, or even most, of the learning at college goes on outside of the lecture hall, as students interact in academic discussion groups, as part of their extracurricular activities, or while just “hanging out.” If students are all from similar backgrounds, their ability to learn from each other is greatly reduced, because they will tend to share assumptions and even entire ideologies. For example, consider the extreme case of a class composed entirely of students from New York and New Jersey. During the years I was at Yale, it was clear that we could build the entire entering class of qualified students from these two states. Would such a class have the diversity to ensure that students could learn from each other if they wished to?

When I started college, my roommate was from Atlanta, Georgia. Other students on my floor were from Pennsylvania, Texas, Illinois, Maine, New York, and Louisiana. Part of what made that freshman year a superb learning experience was that I became friends with students from places that to me were, before, mysteries. I had never met, much less become friends with, people from most of those states.

As usual, however, when it comes to affirmative action the devil is in the details. Exactly how does one go about increasing the representation of members of groups that traditionally have been underrepresented?

The first problem is figuring out what underrepresentation even means. Typically, it means that the proportion of individuals in the institution is lower than that in the population. But by this measure, most institutions have over- and underrepresentation of some groups. For example, most colleges have more students who hail from the same state or from nearby states than from faraway locations. But what are we to make of this fact, exactly? If, for example, students from New York City are overrepresented at New York University or Columbia University, it may be simply because more and/or better students apply from New
York than from other states or regions. How far does a college wish to go with apparently discriminatory standards in order to assuage problems of underrepresentation?

A second problem is ascertaining exactly what constitutes a "group." Are Hispanic Americans a group? The answer is complicated because Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Mexicans, for example, have less in common culturally than a single label might imply. Similarly, Asian Americans from Vietnam and China or of Vietnamese or Chinese descent may have relatively less in common culturally than a single label would suggest, and Asians from Kazakhstan might have even less in common with the first two groups. Indeed, the common group label hides differences that may make two Asian Americans, for example, culturally more distant than two Anglo-Americans from different parts of the United States. So while it is admirable that admissions offices promote diversity by admitting members of diverse groups, they have to reflect carefully on just what they mean by a "group."

The problem is compounded in a society that has traditionally wanted to view itself as a melting pot. We do not have good definitions either of "groups" or of what it means for groups to be "underrepresented." And even if one is able to achieve greater representation of groups that are underrepresented, the melting-pot effect that diversity is intended to encourage—students of different backgrounds working together for a common good—may or may not happen. In many colleges and universities across the country, students of different backgrounds matriculate and then proceed to self-segregate. The result is a class or college that looks diverse on paper, but is not as diverse in terms of actual student interactions.

Under- and overrepresentation may also derive from various groups having, on average, different levels of education. Two groups in the United States with higher than average levels of educational attainment are Asians and Jews. Their high levels of educational attainment may lead to their "overrepresentation," relative to population figures, in colleges and universities. Seats taken up by members of these groups are, in a sense, taken away from seats that could have been occupied by members of underrepresented groups. But would a college want to vary its admissions standards to achieve particular numbers of members of particular groups? And can an institution do so legally? The issue of the academic credentials of candidates from underrepresented groups has been particularly thorny, and has given rise to a number of lawsuits.

These considerations do not, in themselves, argue against (or for) affirmative action. They merely point out that the issues are complex and that people of goodwill may have widely differing opinions. In implementing affirmative action, it helps to have a broad view of what constitutes potential for success. The system I shall propose later can be used with affirmative action to provide such a broad view.

Diversity is not always benign. When someone is admitted in order to increase the diversity of the incoming class, someone else is not admitted. So the risk is that in admitting the applicant from the fiftieth state so that the university can claim students from all fifty states, or the football player, or the oboist, someone else who was as qualified or more qualified in other ways will be excluded. Students of certain Asian ethnicities, for example, have tended in recent years to have especially high grades and test scores, but because they are not considered an "underrepresented" group, they may yield a place in admissions to someone who is so counted and who may have what appear to be weaker credentials. I do not claim to have a simple solution to this conundrum, and anyone who does is probably not trustworthy. Our admissions systems will always favor certain groups over others, depending on what criteria are in favor at a given time. The goal ought to be to make these systems as equitable as possible, realizing that complete equity is a pipe dream. The proposal in this book for achieving equity addresses this issue by
promoting admissions made on the basis of merit, but merit that is more broadly conceived than in the past.

FORMULIC ADMISSIONS

The world of formulic admissions is the polar opposite of the world of affirmative action. Institutions that use formulic admissions usually combine standardized test scores with class rank or GPA in such a way that yields an overall merit score. Such a procedure is used at some state schools, including, until recently, the University of California, and currently, the University of Texas, which automatically admits students from Texas who are in the top 10 percent of their high-school class.

Although formulic admissions sound rather cold, they do have clear advantages, namely predictability, uniformity, and objectivity. They clearly specify which students are admissible and which are not. They clearly specify the criteria for admissions, operationalize those criteria, and then apply them in a uniform and objective way to their applicants. One is spared the endless arguments over how to define groups, which groups to favor, and how one can justify rejecting students who may, in obvious ways, be highly qualified.

If formulic admissions are so straightforward, why are they rarely used by private institutions? For one thing, they severely limit the criteria that serve as the basis of admissions. Few admissions officers would argue about the usefulness of high-school GPA, and most would accept that standardized test scores are also helpful. But admissions would be very narrowly conceived if only those two measures, or others like them, were used for making decisions. Many people who work in admissions believe that an applicant's ability to succeed, even academically, is very narrowly measured by standardized tests. These tests do not measure creativity, motivation, passion for learning, and other skills and attitudes that are important for academic success. Moreover, to the extent that the goal of admissions is to admit people who will be active citizens and leaders of society, high-school GPA and standardized test scores seem to miss the mark almost entirely.

In addition, formulic admissions assume that a given score or GPA means the same thing for different people. But is a GPA of 3.5 or class rank of the top 10 percent the same in a high school that is barely competitive as in one that is highly competitive? Does an SAT score of 650 mean the same thing for a student who grows up speaking English as a native language in an upper-middle-class community, versus one for whom English is a second or even third language who grows up in a challenging inner-city situation?

Finally, what if formulic admissions lead to a class that is extremely uniform in terms of background or ethnicity? It seems that formulic admissions give an appearance of objectivity, but even as this strategy solves some problems, it creates others.

OPEN AND LOTTERY-BASED ADMISSIONS

Yet another option is open admissions. If there are more applicants than there are slots, then a lottery is used to determine who will get one of the available spaces. This system is widely used in continental Europe, and at this writing, Hugo Chávez, president of Venezuela, has decreed that his country should change from exam-based admissions to open admissions. Community colleges generally use open admissions or something close to it, and various commentators have proposed using lottery-based admissions for selective colleges. Jerome Karabel, a distinguished scholar of higher education at the University of California, Berkeley, recently proposed a lottery for admission to prestigious colleges limited to those with strong academic credentials.

Of course, the question remains: what constitutes strong academic credentials? School grades are probably the most central measures of such credentials. Those who support open admissions may argue that it is the
only democratic system for deciding who should get a seat in the university. To give everyone an equal opportunity, they believe, everyone must have the same chance of gaining admission, which is 100 percent if space is available, or, at worst, the same percentage for everyone if there is not enough room for all.

If open admission is used, the university has two follow-up options. One is to try to ensure that almost all students can go on to receive a diploma, if they put in at least a decent amount of effort. Because some individuals are not particularly adroit as students, such a practice generally results in a university's having rather low standards, at least for passing. The second follow-up option, used more often in Europe and especially France, is to admit all students, but then flunk out many of them. For example, in France, there are different diplomas depending on the number of years one is able to stay at the university. In this way, standards are kept high, but at the same time, large numbers of students never finish the program they intended to finish. They are left with educations that are incomplete from almost any point of view.

Open admission has not been popular in the United States except where it has been legislated. One reason may be that, at least in present times, the practice of flunking out large numbers of students is not popular. Indeed, many students seem to become distressed if they receive any grade lower than an A, and many professors have taken the path of least resistance and given grades that meet students' exceedingly high expectations.

A related reason is that, even with competitive admissions, standards for what is expected of students probably have declined over the years. Certainly, the quality and quantity of work required for an A has gone down. It has to have, with many colleges reporting As being given to half or more of students in a particular course. Another symptom of the decline is the falling reading level of books assigned to students, a change that professors have decréd (even as they clamor for lower-level books). And this happens with credentialed admissions. With open adm-
missions, the expectation is that declines in standards would be even greater.

In addition, the United States has tended to opt for what the population perceives as a more meritocratic system, even if it is less "democratic" in the sense of everyone having an equal chance to attend any school. The problem of defining what constitutes merit has been a vexing one, but on the whole, schools have decided for a system in which grades, standardized test scores, letters of recommendation, and extracurricular activities play a major role in the admissions process. In the United States, this system has been viewed as democratic in the sense that it ideally gives each student an equal chance to succeed and thus gain college admission. In practice, probably no one believes that each student truly gets an equal opportunity to succeed. If a student grows up in an inner-city environment, the chances are that he or she will not have the same educational opportunities as a student who goes to school in a wealthy suburb. Rather, what admissions committees do is look at indicators of future success, while trying to take into account a student's background and available opportunities, and then try to select a diverse class where students will be able to do the work and contribute to the college community as a whole.

Another reason has to do with rewarding hard work. It would be hard to sell open admissions as a generalized procedure in the United States because such admissions would run contrary to the view that people should be rewarded for their efforts, or punished for not trying hard enough. If institutions were to take away the college admissions contest, then the fear is that students would have little incentive to work hard in high school.

Research in psychology, however, has shown that so-called extrinsic rewards can undermine intrinsic motivation. In other words, if one does something for the sheer pleasure of doing it, but then a system of rewards is introduced by which one is given concrete awards for doing the same things, eventually one starts doing the things not for the enjoyment of them, but for the re-
wards. As counterintuitive as it may seem, giving rewards can actually destroy the pleasure that people once took in doing an activity.

In the educational system of the United States, extrinsic rewards have done a fairly thorough job of undermining whatever intrinsic motivation students may have had for studying hard. With few exceptions, schools grade performance, and the grade is for high stakes. The result is that students often work for grades rather than for any joy they might otherwise experience in learning.

For all these reasons, open admissions has not caught on in the United States, except among community colleges and a few other colleges. This is a big exception, however, because large numbers of students begin their career in higher education in a community college. Many such students later transfer to four-year colleges. But because higher prestige is associated with more selective admissions, it is unlikely that the system will spread widely anytime soon.

**GEOGRAPHICALLY RESTRICTED ADMISSIONS**

In Spain, there are severe geographic restrictions on where students can go to universities. In general, they are expected to go to universities that reflect where in the country they live. In the United States, the system of state-supported colleges and universities is somewhat more flexible, but nevertheless enforces restrictions and, sometimes, quotas. If a student is applying to a state-sponsored university from out of state, the standards for admission are generally higher, and the possibility of matriculation is further reduced by what are usually substantially higher rates of tuition than in-state students would pay.

Because this system is so entrenched in the United States, it is rarely questioned. But it does result in imbalances of educational opportunities across the country, much as the elementary-secondary system results in imbalances when students are allowed to go only to schools in their own communities. In the case of the higher education system, a student growing up in North Dakota has an edge in admission to, say, the University of North Dakota, centered in Grand Forks. A student growing up in California has an edge in admissions at the University of California, Berkeley, one of the most prestigious institutions in the world. Students in both states compete for admission to their state universities. But their success will depend in large part on the state in which they grew up.

On its face, this system seems unfair. Why should a student growing up in Fargo, North Dakota, have less of an educational opportunity than a similarly qualified student growing up in Palo Alto, California? Traditionally, the main reason offered for this disparity is that the state government funds the state universities, so it makes sense to favor in-state applicants, whose parents’ taxes pay for the schools and their upkeep.

The story has changed somewhat as state legislatures have continually decreased their contributions to the state universities. Indeed, today many state universities have to obtain the overwhelming proportion of their support from sources other than their legislatures, making them “state” universities more in name than in funding. Some universities have even talked of privatizing, although state legislatures to date have been possessive of their universities, wanting power without wanting to pay for it.

The structure of state universities is unlikely to change anytime soon, so it is likely that these universities will continue to give strong geographic preferences to residents of their own states. But then, private universities also have geographic preferences, except that they are not codified. A qualified student applying to Harvard or Yale from Montana has an edge over a qualified student from Massachusetts or Connecticut, because both universities seek geographic diversity and have a harder time attracting highly able students from Montana than from nearby their campuses. The population of Montana is relatively small, and many Montanans, for geographic, academic, or finan-
cial reasons, might not readily think of these colleges as plausible options. So whether codified or not, place of residence matters quite a bit in the United States, as it does in much of Europe.

FLEXIBLE ADMISSIONS

Most selective institutions use a system of flexible admissions. They take into account high-school GPA and standardized test scores, but interpret them in the context of the many variables that can influence them. They also take into account other factors, such as athletic, musical, artistic, and scientific accomplishments, experience in student government, and experience in other service work. And they consider letters of recommendation, application essays, and sometimes, personal interviews.

Flexible admissions may be done in the context of affirmative action, or may be blind to affirmative-action considerations. Some schools also attempt to achieve flexible admissions in a need-blind way that guarantees that financial need will not be a factor in admission. In practice, only a small number of schools are able to reach, and fewer are able to maintain, a truly need-blind admissions practice.

The system proposed in this book augments that of flexible admissions. It does not replace existing indices but rather adds new ones. It is based on the notion that current assessments tend to be narrower than they should be, and that, with broader assessments, we better can reach our goals of academic excellence coupled with diversity.

Diversity has become a source of consternation and even of apprehension among some applicants and their parents. The feeling is that a student who is a perfectly good applicant may be rejected to make room for a "diverse" applicant, whatever "diverse" is supposed to mean. The apprehension is not unfounded. As explained earlier, colleges do seek diversity and it is harder to get into Harvard if you are from New York City than if you are from Butte, Montana, and harder to get in if you don't happen to be captain of an athletic team than if you are the captain.

My wife, Karin, who is from Germany, finds all this emphasis on diversity puzzling. The school from which she graduated, the University of Heidelberg, admits students based on their school grades. Whether you are an athletic or musical superstar does not matter one whit, and any time you spent on athletics or music that took away from your school grades was at your own risk. The same is true in most of Europe and, indeed, in most of the world. Many people in the United States share Karin's puzzlement. What is the relevance of all this "diversity" stuff to college admissions?

In the election campaign between Obama and McCain, the country witnessed firsthand what happens when people are brought up lacking appreciation, or even tolerance of, diversity. The smear campaign against Obama—that he was "not like us," a closet terrorist, even the anti-Christ—was appalling, but predictable. At the same time, there were smears against McCain on account of his age. Smears have been used in U.S. political campaigns since our country was founded. What was not so predictable was the extent to which people believed what they heard. Perhaps we should have expected it, given that John Kerry, the Vietnam War hero, had been painted as a coward in an earlier election campaign against presidential and vice-presidential candidates who had not served in Vietnam.

We need diversity in our colleges and universities to teach students to understand, appreciate, and even value viewpoints other than their own. At Tufts, for example, most students are Democrats. It is important to ensure that there are Republicans in the mix so that students can come to understand how others could have points of view that are different. The same would be true of a campus composed mostly of Republicans. What went on in Alaska when it nearly reelected Senator Ted Stevens after he was convicted of multiple felonies (convictions that were later overturned?) It would help the discussion on college campuses if some students from Alaska were there who might be able to explain what people were thinking. Years ago, when O. J. Simpson
was acquitted of criminal charges, the same percentage of African Americans thought he was innocent as the percentage of white Americans who thought he was guilty. In order for each group to understand the other’s point of view, they needed to be able to interact. And did women, on average, view the Hillary Clinton candidacy differently than did men? If there were no women students on campus, or if there were no men, one could not find out, at least through direct dialogue.

Without diversity, the intellectual life of a campus is constricted. People may come to believe that their own point of view is the only sensible one, or even the only one. Parents sometimes fail to realize that, when they send their children away to college, they are paying as much for the fellow students their child will meet as they are for the professors and campus facilities. The fellow students will help shape the beliefs of the student and may become lifelong friends. If they all have the same point of view, the student will miss out on one of the most important aspects of a college education—learning how to understand and appreciate diverse points of view.

A NEW WAY OF LOOKING AT INTELLIGENCE AND SUCCESS

The greatest problem facing colleges and universities today—in their admissions, instruction, and assessment—is that many administrators are locked into an archaic notion of what it means to be intelligent. This dated notion has resulted in a tremendous waste of human resources, as well as the miseducation of millions of youngsters.

WHAT IS INTELLIGENCE?

What specifically is involved in intelligent thinking? Two symposia held in 1921 and 1986 tackled this question by trying to ascertain the key features of intelligence! According to experts gathered at these symposia, the critical elements of intelligence are the abilities to (1) adapt to meet the demands of the environment, (2) engage in elementary processes of perception and attention, (3) use higher-level processes of abstract reasoning, mental representation, problem solving, and decision making, (4) learn, and (5) respond effectively to problem situations.

But the symposia’s findings are just one exchange in a long and contentious debate over what comprises intelligence. Some experts, such as Edwin Boring in 1923, have been content to define intelligence operationally, that is, simply as the intelligence quotient, or IQ.² Originally, IQ was defined as a ratio of one’s mental-age level of performance to one’s chronological-age level.