

# Minorities can't measure up?

That's what affirmative action policies imply, though you won't hear its liberal backers say so

BETHESDA, Md. — For years I've suspected that many liberals favor affirmative action because they believe blacks and Hispanics can't measure up to the same standards as whites, but it's been difficult to get any of them to say so publicly.

Now Rutgers University President Francis L. Lawrence, a staunch proponent of affirmative action throughout his career, has let the cat out of the bag.

In comments to a faculty group discussing the school's admission criteria, Lawrence referred to blacks as a "disadvantaged population that doesn't have the genetic, hereditary background" to score equally with whites on the Scholastic Aptitude Test.

Lawrence has since apologized for his comments — which he now says he doesn't actually believe — and students have led angry protests demanding his resignation.



**COUNTERPOINTS**  
By Linda Chavez

But the fact is that affirmative-action programs at universities around the country operate as if Lawrence were right.

They routinely apply lower admission standards to black and Hispanic applicants, all the while pretending that such double standards won't reinforce negative stereotypes and stigmatize students admitted under them.

The University of California at Berkeley, for example, admits black and Hispanic students with test scores and grade-point averages significantly below those it requires of both white and Asian students.

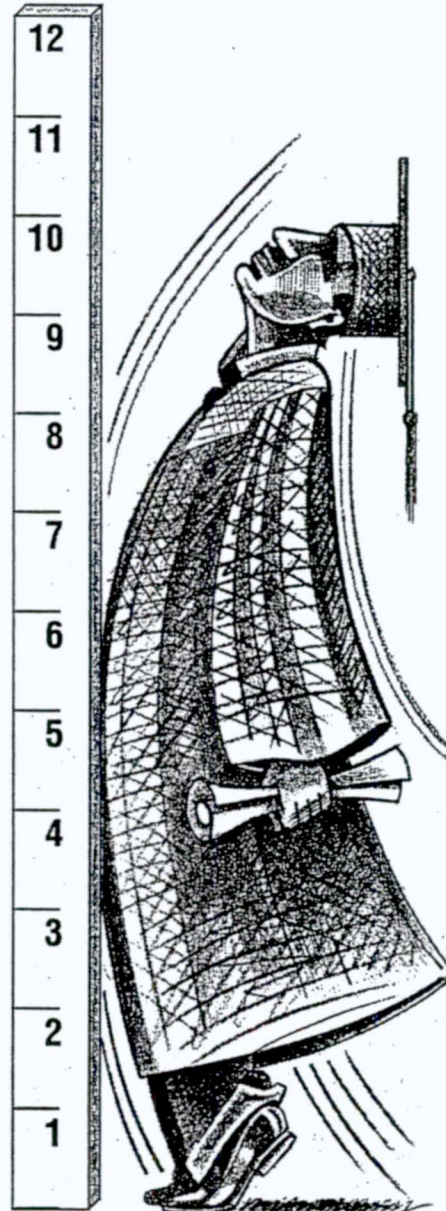
Berkeley is one of the few universities that has made available such information, even on a limited basis.

In 1989, Berkeley turned away approximately 2,800 white students with perfect 4.0 GPAs — straight As. But half of the minority students it admitted that year had below a 3.53 GPA.

And contrary to the assumptions of many affirmative-action supporters, students admitted on the basis of lower test scores and grades aren't necessarily economically disadvantaged graduates of poor inner-city schools.

At Berkeley, for example, the average Hispanic student admitted through the affirmative action program comes from a middle-class family, and many if not most attended integrated schools, often in the suburbs.

In fact, 17% of Hispanic entering freshmen admitted to Berkeley in 1989 came from families that earned more than



By Marcia Staimer, USA TODAY

\$75,000 a year, as did 14% of black students.

Statistics like these make it increasingly difficult for advocates to argue that affirmative action is intended to benefit disadvantaged minorities.

One Mexican-American student told researchers studying the Berkeley program she was "unaware of the things that have been going on with our people, all the injustice we've suffered, how the world really is. I thought racism didn't exist, and here, you know, it just comes to light."

No doubt she was referring to the political indoctrination many minority students receive in such programs so they'll know how "oppressed" they really are, despite attending one of the world's elite institutions of higher learning.

But the comments that racism at Berkeley "just comes to light" might just as well apply to the university's own admission

## What others are saying

**"W**e are happily at a time when a number of the compensations that were earlier advanced to make up for earlier discrimination are no longer needed."

— Calif. Gov. Pete Wilson

**"I**f the president respects the goal of affirmative action as fully as he should, he might gain political support from voters who believe in pursuing an integrated society. . . . But if he ignores the subject and lets critics set the terms of the debate . . . he's likely to be stuck with affirmative action as a thin cover for nasty, race-minded politics — the Willie Horton issue of 1996. And it's likely to contribute to his loss."

— Lincoln Caplan, Newsweek magazine contributing editor

**"T**he people in America now are paying a price for things that were done before they were born. We did discriminate. . . . But should future generations have to pay for that?"

— Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole

**"W**e know that affirmative action has created problems, abuses we didn't contemplate. But if you eliminate or severely curb . . . then what?"

— Calif. Lt. Gov. Gray Davis

**"(I**t's) going to be hell. . . . You better make sure you prepare for it."

— Franklyn Jenifer, president of the University of Texas at Dallas, warning college administrators of a backlash from minority students if affirmative action policies are removed

standards, which clearly do treat applicants differently according to their race.

Affirmative action advocates can't have it both ways. A system that depends on holding minorities to different — and lower — standards than whites invites prejudice and bolsters bigotry.

But it also sends a clear message to the intended beneficiaries that those who claim to want to help minorities don't really believe blacks and Hispanics can ever measure up to whites.

Most supporters of affirmative action no doubt would be horrified that anyone might interpret their intentions so malignly. But their actions speak as loudly as words.

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