

Study quantifies minority enrollment losses if affirmative action is eliminated

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A nationwide ban on affirmative action in college admissions would cause a 10 percent drop in black and Hispanic enrollment at the nation's most selective colleges and universities, according to a new study. Overall black and Hispanic representation in four-year institutions would decline by two percent, the study found.

The research, conducted by economist Jessica Howell of California State University, Sacramento, is published in the January issue of the [Journal of Labor Economics](#).

Howell used nationwide data from the high school graduating class of 1992 to model the admissions practices of colleges as well as the application and matriculation decisions of students. She used that model to predict how institutions and students might react if affirmative action programs ended nationwide.

The model predicts that the number of [minority students](#) accepted to more than one school would drop by 2.5 percentage points. The number of minority student not accepted to any schools would go up by 1.8 percentage points. That translates into a drop in overall minority enrollment at 4-year colleges of two percent.

“This result is magnified at the most selective 4-year colleges, where the affirmative action ban is predicted to result in reduced minority representation by 10.2%,” Howell wrote in her report.

The enrollment declines would be almost entirely because of the admissions decisions of colleges, not because minority students would be discouraged from submitting applications, Howell found. Her model predicts only a small decline in the number of applications submitted by minority students. That result, Howell says, is similar to studies of minority applications conducted in Texas and California, where affirmative action bans are already in place.

Howell also used her model to predict the impact of programs that could potentially replace affirmative action. Texas and Florida, for example, have instituted programs guaranteeing admission to students who finish in the top 10 percent of their graduating classes. But Howell finds that such programs, if extended nationwide, would do little to offset predicted minority enrollment losses. Likewise, Howell found that stepping up minority recruitment or creating pre-college programs for minority students would also have little effect.

More information: Jessica S. Howell, “[Assessing the Impact of Eliminating Affirmative Action in Higher Education](#).” *Journal of Labor Economics* 28:1 (January 2010).

Provided by University of Chicago

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