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Columbia University in the City of New York  
Office of Undergraduate Admissions  
212 Hamilton Hall, Mail Code 2807  
1130 Amsterdam Avenue  
New York, NY 10027

Dear Sir or Madam,

It has come to our attention that, as is the case with many other institutions for higher education, Columbia's application for potential students contains a section wherein candidates are asked to indicate their race/ethnicity (found on page 19 of the First-year Undergraduate Application). Although widely accepted (and expected), this practice needs to find its way into the past and allow students and academia to move forward.

Known as "The Father of Modern Anthropology," Franz Boas established the anthropology program at Columbia University in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and he was one of the most outspoken opponents of the notion of "scientific racism." Although he began his academic career as a physicist, in his research and teaching, he sought to understand the impact on personal development due to immersion in cultural attitudes. Because of his efforts, it is widely understood today that the use of biological determination in personal identification is flawed at best and racist/sexist/ageist at worst.

Although Affirmative Action was initiated with what seemed to be good intentions, statistics have now proven it to be a failure. Mandating that certain percentages be attained in the acceptance process does little in converting the hearts and minds of people with biases. In fact, it reinforces the ignorance and vocabulary employed in asserting antiquated stereotypes. These statistics (which are perhaps one of the only useful outcomes of Affirmative Action), should be closely heeded; after all, abnegation when presented with facts is listed as a mental disorder known commonly as 'denial.' They point to the precipitous drop in self-esteem and the decrease in overall academic and professional success of students who felt they were accepted merely for the color of their skin or their gender. No individual gains confidence in feeling they were chosen simply to fulfill statistics, and it can often lead to a sense of alienation among one's peers. People are poised to do their best work when they feel they have attained success through their own merits, not the lottery of biology.

Furthermore, this practice inherently accuses those reviewing applications of being unable to render decisions without racial bias, and it suggests that lower standards should be applied to certain individuals and higher standards for others. In other words, it reinforces the biases that were to be overcome. In selecting students for attendance at Columbia, their academic credentials, skills, extra-curricular involvement, interests and character are considered. Their race/ethnicity has nothing to do with any of these attributes (frankly, to argue otherwise, is racist).

We recommend that the race/ethnicity section on page 19 in the First-year Undergraduate Application at Columbia be deleted. It is unnecessary and has proven to do more harm than good. Choose students who fulfill the academic requirements for attending Columbia, and thereby legitimize their hard work to get there. Racism is still a problem in the United States, but Affirmative Action has been repeatedly shown to be an anti-solution.

Franz Boas helped pioneer the efforts against the widely accepted biological determinism of his time, perhaps Columbia can consider his wisdom again today. With more and more institutions removing this portion of applications, we can gradually move past the "ugly racism of lowered expectations."

Sincerely,

Jennifer L. Loos  
National Secretary