

# UW-Madison: Responding to the Supreme Court decision on admissions

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*Chancellor Jennifer L. Mnookin shared the following message with all UW-Madison students and employees on June 29, 2023.*

To our campus community,

Today, the United States Supreme Court ruled 6 to 3 that Harvard University's and the University of North Carolina's use of an applicant's race as a factor in their admissions processes violated the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment. The Court's majority opinion also stated that colleges and universities may consider in admissions decisions "an applicant's discussion of how race affected the applicant's life, so long as that discussion is concretely tied to a quality of character or unique ability that the particular applicant can contribute to the university."

The consideration of race in admissions is an important national issue and today's ruling will generate a wide range of reactions on our campus and in our country.

As acknowledged in the opinions, at the heart of the cases before the Supreme Court was disagreement about how to address our nation's history of racism and the legacy of slavery and discrimination that have played a role in who can access higher education. There are, as is evident in the Court's opinions and the national debate over these questions, a range of ideas about how to reconcile these challenges and create diverse student bodies at our nation's colleges and universities.

As our [mission statement](#) articulates:

*UW-Madison seeks to help students to develop an understanding and appreciation for the complex cultural and physical worlds in which they live and to realize their highest potential of intellectual, physical and human development.*

*[The university] also seeks to attract and serve students from diverse social, economic and ethnic backgrounds and to be sensitive and responsive to those groups which have been underserved by higher education.*

There can be little doubt that in our complex, multicultural world, the ability for each of us to work effectively and learn from those different from ourselves is a critical skill and strength. A growing body of research shows that diverse teams with different life experiences and identities tend to make stronger decisions. At UW-Madison, we see and value the ways that diversity in our community strengthens the learning environment for all.

To help achieve this, we have considered the race of applicants as one factor in a holistic admissions process that focuses first and foremost on candidates' academic strength. Our process looks at written statements, extracurriculars, recommendations, and the range of experiences, talents and backgrounds candidates will bring to the university. Every admitted student here at UW-Madison has demonstrated the potential for academic success within our competitive applicant pools.

Though we have seen a roughly 50 percent increase in our underrepresented undergraduate student population in the past five years, our current enrollment percentages of underrepresented students still lag behind many of our peers.

The full implications of today's ruling — both nationally and on our campus — will not be known for some time. UW-Madison and UW System attorneys are now carefully reviewing the Court's opinions and monitoring the potential release of additional guidance from relevant federal agencies. We will be sharing information and providing updates at [go.wisc.edu/scotusdiversity](https://go.wisc.edu/scotusdiversity).

The ruling will require some modifications to aspects of our current admissions practices; we will, of course, adapt our practices to comply with the law. At the same time, I want to reiterate that our commitment to the value of diversity within our community, including racial diversity, remains a bedrock value of the institution.

I want to stress to all our students, faculty, staff, prospective students and families

that UW–Madison remains committed to creating a community where people of all backgrounds, identities, and beliefs belong and can thrive. Our excellence in teaching, research and outreach demands no less.

Chancellor Jennifer Mnookin