

Court Filings Detail Role of Race in Harvard Undergraduate Admissions

Nonprofit says the Ivy League school penalizes Asian-Americans by giving them lower ratings on personal traits during admissions process



A lawsuit claims Harvard's admissions process is unconstitutional and illegal under federal civil rights law because it intentionally discriminates against Asian-American applicants and relies too heavily on race.

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Harvard University and the organization accusing it of discriminating against Asian-American applicants each say race plays a role in the school's admissions decisions, but sharply disagree about whether that constitutes evidence of illegal bias, according to court documents filed on Friday.

The filings are part of a lawsuit in Boston federal court brought against the Ivy League school in 2014 by Students for Fair Admissions, a nonprofit whose members include Asian-Americans who were denied admission to Harvard. The motions are effectively a preview for the trial in the case, which begins in October.

The lawsuit claims Harvard's admissions process is unconstitutional and illegal under federal civil rights law because it intentionally discriminates against Asian-American applicants and holds them to a higher standard. The plaintiffs have said their goal is to reach the Supreme Court.

The filings, which contain hundreds of pages and rely on data for individual applicants to the classes that entered Harvard between 2010 and 2015, give the public the most detailed look ever at Harvard's method for selecting its incoming undergraduate class

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