Preface

STRETCHING FROM St. Paul to New Orleans, Mark Twain's Mississippi winds for twelve hundred miles through fog, rapids, slow eddies, sandbars, bends, and hidden bluffs. Drawing upon his own experiences on the Mississippi, Twain created an image of the river as both physically central to the United States and symbolically central to the progress of the country. The image of the river is also central to the story of our book, which is concerned with the flow of talent—particularly of talented black men and women—through the country's system of higher education and on into the marketplace and the larger society.

The image most commonly invoked in discussions of this process is the "pipeline." We often hear of the importance of keeping young people moving through the "pipeline" from elementary school to high school to college, on through graduate and professional schools, and into jobs, family responsibilities, and civic life. But this image is misleading, with its connotation of a smooth, well defined, and well understood passage. It is more helpful to think of the nurturing of talent as a process akin to moving down a winding river, with rock-strewn rapids and slow channels, muddy at times and clear at others. Particularly when race is involved, there is nothing simple, smooth, or highly predictable about the education of young people.

While riverboat pilots on the Mississippi navigated "point to point"—only as far as they could see into the next bend—they had to know every depth, every deceptive shoal, and every hidden snag of the river. Moreover, since the boats ran throughout the night, in high water and low, and both up the river and down it, these pilots had to know the river's features in every imaginable condition, and from either direction. Even though they could only steer through what they saw in front of them, they had to understand how the bend that they were navigating at any moment fit into the shape of a twelve-hundred-mile river.

The college admissions process and the educational experience that follows it are similarly complex. Most recently, debate about the use of race as a criterion has centered on the question of who "merits" or "deserves" a place in the freshman class. At this one bend in the river, prior grades and numerical test scores offer a tempting means of defining qualifications, since they are easily compiled and compared. But what do they really tell us, and what are we trying to predict? Much more, surely, than first-year grades or even graduation from one college or another. It is the contributions that individuals make throughout their

lives and the broader impact of higher education on the society that are finally most relevant.

In this book, we seek to be helpful to both the "pilots" of this educational process—the parents of prospective students, the high school counselors, college admissions officers, faculty members, and administrators, trustees, and regents responsible for setting policies—and those future students who will some day have to navigate the river. We also hope this study will be useful to employers, legislators, and the public as a whole, since everyone has an interest in the development of talent and access to opportunity in our society. We need to know as much as we can about what has happened around bends and curves—in college, in graduate school, and then twenty years downstream—from the frozen moment in time when seventeen-year-olds from various races and backgrounds sat down with Number 2 pencils to take the SAT. This book is an attempt to chart what race-sensitive admissions policies have meant over a long stretch of the river—both to the individuals who were admitted and to the society that has invested in their education and that counts so heavily on their future leadership.

These questions are enormously important because this country is not yet where any of us would want it to be in terms of race relations. On this central point, liberals and conservatives often agree. Echoing W.E.B. Du Bois, John Hope Franklin has argued eloquently that "the problem of the twenty-first century will be the problem of the color line. . . . By any standard of measurement or evaluation the problem has not been solved in the twentieth century, and thus becomes a part of the legacy and burden of the next century."[1] The problem of "the color line" is so central to American life for reasons that are rooted in the disjunction between the values embedded in the Constitution and the realities of three centuries of collective experience. These reasons reflect a sense on the part of many that, despite all the progress made in the past fifty years, we have not yet succeeded in transcending a racial divide that too often discourages the development of ordinary relationships among individuals based on trust and mutual respect. They include as well persistent gross inequities in wealth, privilege, and position that are hard to explain away simply on the basis of differences in individual effort and initiative, significant as such differences are. Finally, there is a collective concern that we are failing to develop to its fullest the human potential of the country and a growing realization that our society, with its ever more diverse population, cannot ultimately succeed as a democracy if we fail to close the gaps in opportunity that continue to be associated with race.

The subject of race in America is as sensitive and contentious as it is

[1] Franklin 1993, p. 5.

important. Highly charged words, such as "fairness," "merit," "achievement," "preference," and even "race" itself, often take on very different connotations depending on the speaker and the context. (Note, for example, the radical differences in polling results when the wording of questions about race is changed in relatively minor ways.)[2] Language itself has been a casualty of heated debate; for this reason one aim of this study is to "unpack" the meaning of terms such as "merit," clarify their various possible meanings, and set forth the consequences of embracing one conception of what they signify rather than another.

Our country respects individual achievement, but it also recognizes that what people have achieved often depends on the families they have grown up in, the neighborhoods in which they have lived, and the schools they have attended, as well as on their own ability and hard work. People rightly seek a society in which racial prejudice no longer limits opportunities. But any close observer of American society cannot help but see the many ways in which, covertly and overtly, consciously and unconsciously, actively and as a consequence of inertia, racial differences that have been long in the making continue to thwart aspirations for an open and just society. Words reflect this reality. When an interviewer interested in nomenclature asked the distinguished social psychologist, Kenneth Clark, "What is the best thing for blacks to call themselves," Clark replied: "White."[3]

THE NATURE OF THIS STUDY

Many Americans are uncomfortable about the use of race as a factor in admitting students to selective colleges and professional schools. Critics have attacked the policy on several grounds. They maintain that it is wrong for universities to exclude white applicants with high grades and impressive test scores while accepting minority applicants with lower grades and scores. They point out that admissions officers sometimes accept minority applicants who are not disadvantaged but come from wealthier, more privileged homes and better schools than some applicants who are rejected. They claim that all such policies accentuate racial differences, intensify prejudice, and interfere with progress toward a color-blind society. They assert that admitting minority applicants with

[2] See Kravitz et al. 1996. A New York Times/CBS News Poll indicated that "the issue of affirmative action, much like abortion, is particularly sensitive to semantics" (Verhovek 1997b, p. A1). Even more recently, the rewording of a referendum in Houston seems to have played a major role in retaining that city's affirmative action program (Verhovek 1997a, p. A1).

[3] Roberts 1995, p. 7.

lower grades and scores may stigmatize and demoralize the very students that the policy attempts to help, by forcing them to compete with classmates of greater academic ability.

Defenders of race-sensitive admissions respond with arguments of their own. They insist that such policies are justified to atone for a legacy of oppression and to make up for continuing discrimination in the society. They point out that admissions officers have long deviated from standardized test scores and prior grades to favor athletes, legacies, and other applicants with special characteristics that are deemed desirable. They argue that admitting a diverse class gives students of all races a better preparation for living and working in an increasingly diverse society.

Until now, the debate has proceeded without much empirical evidence as to the effects of such policies and their consequences for the students involved. The chapters that follow seek to remedy this deficiency by drawing on an extensive study of students from a number of academically selective colleges and universities—places where the debate over race-sensitive institutions has been played out in "real time." We are concerned primarily with the performance, in college and after college, of black and white students admitted to these schools.

In setting forth the "facts," as best we can discern them, we recognize that all data of this kind are subject to many interpretations. Moreover, even considering such questions can antagonize people on both sides of the argument who believe that the "right principles" are so compelling that no amount of evidence can change their minds. Plainly, data take us only so far in considering this subject. Individuals who agree on "the facts" may still end up disagreeing about what should be done because of overriding differences in values. As a result, we have no expectation that the analyses presented in this study will resolve complex issues to everyone's satisfaction. But we do hope that our research can inform the debate by framing questions carefully and presenting what we have learned about outcomes.

Of course, it is widely understood that in framing questions and testing hypotheses, investigators are always influenced by their own values and preconceptions. We know that we have been. It would be disingenuous not to acknowledge that both of us came to this study of race-sensitive admissions with a history of having worked hard, over more than three decades, to enroll and educate more diverse student bodies at two of the country's best-known universities. This does not mean that we have favored quotas (we have not) or that we are unaware of how easy it can be for good intentions to lead people astray. Nor have we ever believed that all colleges or universities—including those with which we have been most closely involved—have always made the right choices or imple-

mented every policy perfectly. Still, the fact remains that we are both strongly identified with what we regard as responsible efforts to improve educational opportunities for well-qualified minority students.

At the same time, in contemplating this study, we recognized that race-sensitive admissions policies rested on a set of assumptions that had not heretofore been tested empirically. Much basic information was lacking about such topics as the academic performance of minority students with higher and lower test scores in the most selective colleges and universities, the nature and extent of interaction among different races on campus, and the subsequent careers of minority students accepted through race-sensitive policies. When we began the study, we were far from certain what the data would reveal. Quite possibly, some important assumptions underlying the efforts to enroll more minority students would turn out to be unfounded. Nevertheless, we felt that after thirty years, it was surely time to discover the facts, insofar as it was possible to do so. It was important, we thought, to try to understand and come to terms with any disappointing results as well as to learn from positive outcomes. Now that we have completed our study, we can only say that we have learned a great deal along the way. The image of the river, with its twists and turns and muddy patches, as well as its occasional brilliant vistas, seems exactly right for describing an educational process that has turned out to be even more subtle and complicated than we had imagined it to be when we began our research.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study is limited in several important respects. First, we are concerned solely with higher education. In our view, one problem with much of the debate over affirmative action is that it lumps together a large number of highly disparate areas and programs, ranging from the awarding of contracts to minority-owned businesses to policies governing hiring and promotion to the admissions policies of colleges and universities. The arguments that pertain to one area may or may not apply in other areas. It is noteworthy, for example, that the plaintiffs in the *Piscataway* case, which centered on the layoff of a white secondary school teacher, took pains in their final brief to ask the Supreme Court not to confuse the job-specific issues that confronted the plaintiff with the much broader, and rather different, sets of considerations that face educational institutions in deciding whom to admit.[4]

[4] A brief filed with the Court in October 1997 on behalf of the plaintiff states: "University admissions decisions . . . differ critically from local school boards' employment

Within the realm of higher education, we are concerned only with academically selective colleges and universities. The main reason is that the debate surrounding race-sensitive admissions is relevant primarily within these institutions. In colleges and professional schools that admit nearly every qualified applicant, there is little to debate (although there may be arguments over how "qualified" should be defined, and whether the same definition is applied to white and black candidates). It is when there are strict limits on the number of places in an entering class and far more qualified applicants than places, that the choices become difficult and the issue of whether to give weight to race comes to the forefront. Many very well-regarded public universities have broadly inclusive admissions policies at the undergraduate level, and the overall number of selective undergraduate schools is much smaller than many people assume (see Chapter 2). At the graduate and professional level, many schools also take almost every qualified applicant; however, the leading private and public institutions, including almost all accredited schools of law and medicine, select their students from an appreciably larger number of qualified candidates.

The scope of our study is limited in a third way: although we include information about Hispanic students, our work focuses principally on whites and African Americans (whom we usually refer to as "black"). We hope that other inquiries will be able to do full justice to the educational experiences of Hispanics along with those of Native Americans and Asian Americans. One reason for focusing on black and white students in this study is that so much of the debate over race-sensitive admissions policies

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decisions. Unlike the nuanced, multifaceted decisionmaking process that many universities employ in deciding which students to admit—a process that arguably defies the standard 'underutilization' analysis of employment discrimination law—school boards are able to determine whether their employment decisions have an adverse impact on available, qualified members of minority groups without resorting to racial preferences." (Board of Education of the Township of Piscataway v. Sharon Taxman 1997, p. 40).

It is helpful, in our view, to think of admissions decisions as having many of the attributes of long-term investment decisions involving the creation of human and social capital. The considerations, and especially the risk/reward profiles, that are appropriate to such admissions decisions may be quite different from those that apply elsewhere within the academy itself, never mind outside it. For instance, it may make sense to accept considerably more risk, in return for the possibility of a very high long-term social return, in accepting an applicant for undergraduate study than in appointing a senior professor with tenure. Of course, there are many other differences between admitting students and hiring colleagues, as there are differences between layoffs and new hires. See Bok (1982) for a more general discussion of the differences between affirmative action in admissions and in faculty hiring.

has centered on black-white comparisons.[5] There are also practical considerations. While Hispanics share many of the problems faced by blacks, there are so many differences in cultures, backgrounds, and circumstances within the broad Hispanic category that any rigorous study would need to make more distinctions than are possible within the confines of our database. Native Americans have also endured many handicaps and injustices and have benefited from race-sensitive admissions policies. Nevertheless, their representation at the academically selective colleges and universities is exceedingly small and does not permit proper statistical analysis in a study of this kind. Thus, however much we would have liked to include comparisons with a variety of groups of Hispanic and Native American matriculants, this was not a practical possibility.

Asian Americans differ from other minorities in important respects. Unlike the case of blacks and Hispanics, the percentage of Asian Americans in selective colleges and universities is far higher than their percentage in the population at large and continues to increase at the institutions included in this study. While there are important and sensitive issues associated with the enrollment of Asian American students (who, like Hispanics, are themselves highly diverse), these are different issues from those that confront admissions offices in considering black candidates.

Finally, our study addresses issues of educational policy. Our objective is not to analyze the development of constitutional law, the proper interpretation of civil rights legislation, or the present holdings of the courts in these areas. We are concerned with the admissions policies that colleges and universities have followed and with their consequences for the country.

THE COLLEGE AND BEYOND DATABASE

Much of the new content in this study derives from exploitation of a rich database called College and Beyond (C&B). This database was built by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation over nearly four years (from the end of 1994 through 1997) as a part of the Foundation's broader interest in supporting research in higher education. A full explanation of its construction and its components, including links to data compiled by other researchers, is contained in Appendix A. In brief, the part of the database used in this study contains the records of more than eighty thousand undergraduate students who matriculated at twenty-eight academically

[5] On the issue of which groups should be included in the discussion of race in America, see Shepard (1997); Shepard quotes scholars from the black, Hispanic, and Asian American communities. Shelby Steele is quoted by Shepard as having said: "The real racial divide in America was and remains black and white" (p. 11).

selective colleges and universities in the fall of 1951, the fall of 1976, and the fall of 1989. Created on the explicit understanding that the Foundation would not release or publish data that identified either individual students or individual schools, it is a "restricted access database."

The "in-college" component of the database was compiled from individual student records in collaboration with the participating colleges and universities. For each entering student (except those few cases where records had been lost or were incomplete), the database contains information available at the time the student was admitted, including race, gender, test scores, rank in high school class, and, for many students, information about family background. It also includes records of academic performance in college, compiled mainly from transcripts, which have been linked to the admissions data. Each student record was coded to indicate graduation status (when and if the student graduated), major field of study, grade point average, and whether the student participated in athletics or other time-intensive extracurricular activities.

For many of these same matriculants, we also have extensive survey data describing their subsequent histories (advanced degrees earned, sector of employment, occupation, earned income and family income, involvement in civic activities, marital status and number of children). The respondents were also asked to provide information about where else they applied to college, where they were admitted, whether they did or did not attend their first-choice school, how they now assess their experiences in college, and how satisfied they have been with their lives after college. Finally, for the '89 matriculants only, the survey sought information on the extent to which they interacted (during college and since college) with individuals of different races, political outlooks, socioeconomic backgrounds, and geographic origins. The individuals contacted through the survey were extraordinarily cooperative: the overall sample response rates were 80 percent for the '76 matriculants and 84 percent for the '89 matriculants (Appendix A).

The twenty-eight colleges and universities whose matriculants are included in the C&B database are:

Liberal Arts Colleges	*Research Universities*
Barnard College	Columbia University
Bryn Mawr College	Duke University
Denison University	Emory University
Hamilton College	Miami University (Ohio)
Kenyon College	Northwestern University
Oberlin College	Pennsylvania State University
Smith College	Princeton University

Swarthmore College
Wellesley College
Wesleyan University
Williams College
Rice University
Stanford University
Tufts University
Tulane University
University of Michigan at Ann Arbor
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
University of Pennsylvania
Vanderbilt University
Washington University
Yale University

Thus the database includes both liberal arts colleges and research universities, including four public universities, and it reflects some reasonable geographic spread. These colleges and universities are not, however, at all representative of American higher education. They were not intended to be. All of them share the attribute of being academically selective, though the degree of selectivity (as measured by the average combined verbal and math SAT score of the entering class) varies considerably.

In the fall of 1976, eight of the twenty-eight C&B schools had average combined SAT scores of more than 1250 (before the recentering of the scores by ETS which has raised all the scores). Nationally, we estimate that there were only twenty schools in this category, and the eight C&B schools enrolled 40 percent of all freshmen entering these extremely selective colleges and universities. Another thirteen of the C&B schools had average scores of 1150 to 1250; nationally, there were fifty-three schools in this range, and the thirteen C&B schools enrolled 34 percent of all their freshmen. The remaining seven C&B schools had average SAT scores in the 1000–1149 range, and they enrolled 7 percent of all freshmen who entered the 241 schools with SAT scores in this range.[6] In short, the C&B student population contains a sufficiently large fraction of the total number of matriculants at the most selective colleges and universities that we are reasonably confident that our findings apply generally to this set of institutions and especially to those with average scores above 1150.

In building the C&B database, the intention was to assemble data from a group of schools that were similar enough to permit in-depth comparisons, yet different enough to make such comparisons revealing. Being able to observe the full set of entering students at each of the

[6] See Appendix Table A.2 for the detailed derivation of these percentages. Estimates of the number of institutions in each SAT interval are based on data provided by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA.

participating institutions[7] is a great advantage in studying a subject such as race-sensitive admissions. The large size and census-like character of the database, the strong similarities among the institutions in curricula and admissions standards (with many overlapping applications for admission), and the ability to form coherent clusters of institutions (defined by degree of selectivity and type of school) combine to permit a closer, more intensive examination of black-white differences in outcomes than is possible in studies using national samples of individuals from a larger and more diverse array of institutions. We wanted to be able to examine in detail black-white differences among finely classified subgroups of students: men and women, those with lower and higher SATs, those majoring in a variety of fields, those going on to graduate study and those stopping after receipt of the BA, and so on. We believe that "the shape of the river" must be studied at this level of detail if its course is to be charted accurately.

The other side of the proverbial coin is that because the database was not designed to be "representative," we cannot extrapolate findings from these institutions to the whole of higher education. There are, however, national longitudinal databases that do permit researchers to work with sample data for schools that are much more representative of higher education in general.[8] The objective was to complement the existing longitudinal databases by creating a new resource that would permit more detailed analyses within a circumscribed set of institutions.

METHODS OF ANALYSIS

This study is highly quantitative. In describing and presenting our work, we have used the simplest techniques that are consistent with the obligation to report meaningful results. Most of the findings are presented in the form of tabulations or cross-tabulations, and we make extensive use of bar charts and other figures (from which the main story line of the book can be read).

We also use other standard techniques, primarily multivariate regres-

[7] This is a slight overstatement. We include the full entering cohorts at twenty-four of the twenty-eight institutions; for the other four institutions, we included all the black matriculants and a sample of approximately half of the white matriculants (see Appendix A).

[8] National longitudinal databases include: Beginning Postsecondary Student Longitudinal Study (BPS), Baccalaureate and Beyond (B&B), National Longitudinal Survey of 1972 (NLS), High School and Beyond Longitudinal Study (HS&B), and National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS).

sions, to disentangle the many forces that jointly affect student performance in college, receipt of advanced degrees, and later-life outcomes. While we have no doubt failed to include enough of this finer-grained analysis to satisfy many empirically minded social scientists, we may well have included too much for readers who want only to know "the bottom line." (A considerable amount of explanatory material appears in footnotes.) Our goal has been to achieve the balance that allows us to isolate the effects of different variables—and to understand their interactions—without drifting too far from commonsense questions and answers. Throughout, we have done our best to explain our findings and our methods in language that lay readers can understand.

The methods used to analyze the data are described in Appendix B. We have also included a great deal of material in additional tables in Appendix D in an effort to make it as easy as possible for readers to check our interpretations, and, if they choose, to substitute their own. In due course, we expect others, using more sophisticated econometric techniques, to extend the analysis presented here. In many instances, the simple methods we employ can only suggest directions and permit what we hope are informed judgments concerning relationships.

We have devoted a great deal of effort to providing precisely defined national benchmarks that allow the results for the C&B schools to be seen in context. It is important, for example, to compare the earnings of the black graduates of the C&B schools with the earnings of all black holders of BAs who graduated at roughly the same time and to provide the same data for white graduates. In making all such comparisons (as well as comparisons among various groupings of schools included in the C&B database), we confront the problem of selection bias. The process by which students choose colleges and by which colleges choose students is, of course, anything but random, and such a complicated selection process produces outcomes that are independent of the variables we are able to study. We have done our best to deal with this problem by introducing appropriate controls and by attempting to calibrate some of the remaining effects of this double-selection process, but we do not claim to have found a full resolution to this often intractable problem.

In addition to the many statistics, figures, and tables, we have included in the book some brief personal reflections provided for the most part by individuals who participated in the C&B surveys. These accounts are intended to be only illustrative. Our hope is that they will provide some sense of the kinds of experiences and feelings that underlie the rather antiseptic numbers that appear in such abundance. We would have been reluctant to include these observations—even though many of them are quite revealing—had we not first built the statistical foundation upon which they rest. The stories are meant to amplify the empirical findings

and to be thought-provoking, but not to "prove" or confirm any of our interpretations.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

Chapter 1 describes the origins and evolution of race-sensitive admissions policies in the context of other changes in American society.

Chapter 2 discusses the admissions process and describes how race affects the odds of being admitted to selective colleges. The chapter then proposes an operational definition of a "race-neutral" standard and develops estimates of how many black students in the '89 cohort would not have been admitted to certain C&B schools if such a standard had been applied.

Chapter 3 describes how 1976 and 1989 matriculants fared academically in college—the number who graduated, the majors they chose, how the grades of students varied with their SAT scores, and how black students performed in relation to how we might have expected them to do on the basis of pre-collegiate indicators.

Chapter 4 follows the '76 and '89 matriculants from college to graduate and professional schools and charts how many of them (classified by rank in class as well as race) went on to earn PhDs or degrees in professional fields such as law, medicine, and business.

Chapter 5 explores how the 1976 C&B matriculants have done in the marketplace—how many are employed, how much money they have earned, and how satisfied they are with their jobs. We compare blacks and whites, women and men, and C&B graduates with graduates of all colleges nationwide.

Chapter 6 is concerned with the lives of C&B matriculants outside of the workplace. We examine their civic contributions, marital status, family income, and their own assessments of how satisfied they are with their lives.

Chapter 7 describes the matriculants' responses when asked to look back and give their impressions of what they learned in college, and whether, given the opportunity, they would go back to the same school, choose the same major, and spend their time in the same ways.

Chapter 8 examines how much interaction took place across racial and other lines among the 1989 C&B matriculants and reports on the extent to which students from three different eras (those who entered in 1951, 1976, and 1989) agree or disagree with the degree of emphasis that their colleges have placed on recruiting a racially and ethnically diverse student body.

In Chapter 9, we draw together the major findings from the earlier chapters and discuss their implications for the principal arguments that have been used to criticize race-sensitive admissions policies.

Finally, in Chapter 10, we present our own conclusions concerning the role of race in the admissions process and how concepts such as "fairness" and "merit" should be interpreted.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There is no way we can thank adequately the small army of people who have worked so hard on this study. The evident importance of the subject, and the privilege of being able, perhaps, to contribute something of value to a wrenching national debate, surely account in large measure for the willingness of all of those mentioned below, and others not mentioned, to go far beyond any definition of the call of duty.

We begin by thanking our four principal collaborators:

- James Shulman, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's Administrative and Financial Officer as well as a program and research associate, has had a hand (and a considerable brain) in every facet of the study. He deserves principal credit for having worked tirelessly with individuals at the institutions in the College and Beyond database, as well as with colleagues at the Foundation and others outside it, to guide the construction of a scholarly resource of immense value. He then participated actively in the analysis of the data, in the drafting and editing of chapters, and in the final passage of the manuscript through what must surely have seemed like an endless swamp rather than a smooth flowing river.
- Thomas Nygren, Director of the Princeton office of the Foundation and also the Foundation's Director of Technology (as well as the program officer responsible for grantmaking in South Africa), has overseen all of the technical work that went into the building of the C&B database with characteristic skill and patience. He has also been responsible for supervising the regression analysis and has taken a principal role (with Stacy Berg Dale) in drafting Appendix A and Appendix B and, more generally, in insisting that the subject deserves the most thoroughgoing effort to respect the underlying data.
- Stacy Berg Dale, a Research Associate in the Foundation's Princeton office, has mastered the intricacies of the C&B database. We have depended heavily on her unusual talent for thinking—by reflex, it seems—in terms of multivariate regressions. She has used this talent to challenge conclusions that might have been

accepted at face value, to range freely in exploring alternative hypotheses, and to keep to an absolute minimum the number of arbitrary assumptions and inconsistencies that intrude on any research of this kind.

- Lauren Meserve, a Research Associate in the Foundation's New York office, has worked tirelessly to ensure that the underlying empirical analysis was done correctly and to design the charts and figures that provide the main storyline for the analysis. She has an exceptional range of quantitative and qualitative skills and has been, from start to finish, tenacious in using these talents to improve the research and the presentation of the results.

It is no exaggeration to say that this study could not have been done without the crisp intelligence and unflagging dedication of these four collaborators.

Other colleagues at the Foundation also made valuable contributions. In the Princeton office, Susan Anderson checked and re-checked the text, made many suggestions for improving the exposition, assisted in the preparation of the list of references cited, and was our principal liaison with Princeton University Press. Douglas Mills was enormously helpful in providing advice on statistical questions and in extracting data from the Census and other national databases. Joyce Pierre, Dorothy Westgate, Jennifer Dicke, and Deborah Peikes all made important contributions to what was clearly a group effort. Earlier in the project, Fredrick Vars, now completing his studies at the Yale Law School, was instrumental in constructing the institutional files that underlie the C&B database and in doing initial empirical work on black-white differences in the relation between SAT scores and academic performance. In New York, David Crook also helped organize data and explore various empirical questions.

Still other Mellon Foundation staff members provided an unfailing stream of criticism and suggestions as they read versions of the manuscript. Foremost among this group is Harriet Zuckerman, who read more versions of the manuscript than anyone and did so much to improve the clarity of both the analysis and the exposition. Mary Patterson McPherson, T. Dennis Sullivan, Stephanie Bell-Rose, Jackie Looney, and Henry Drewry also read the manuscript carefully and made useful comments. Pat Woodford, Kamla Motihar, and Ulrica Konvalin proved over and over again their willingness to do whatever was needed to bring the project to conclusion. In Cambridge, Connie Higgins has been of enormous help in a project that tested the patience of all who were caught up in its wake.

We are very fortunate to have benefited from a close reading of the manuscript by outstanding scholars who contributed many valuable sug-

gestions: David Featherman, Director of the Institute of Social Research at the University of Michigan; Randall Kennedy, Professor of Law at the Harvard Law School; Alan Krueger, Bendheim Professor of Economics at Princeton University; three other economists who are now college or university presidents—Richard Levin (Yale University), Michael McPherson (Macalester College), and Harold Shapiro (Princeton University); Michael Nettles, Professor of Education at the University of Michigan; Sarah Turner, Assistant Professor of Education and Economics at the University of Virginia; and Gilbert Whitaker, another economist who is now Dean of the Jones Graduate School of Administration at Rice University. Professors Richard Light of Harvard University, Daniel Kahneman of Princeton University, John Simon of the Yale Law School, and Claire Simon commented on particular chapters. Charles E. Exley, Jr., retired Chairman of NCR Corporation and a Trustee of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, also read the manuscript with great care and made extremely insightful comments—which he transmitted to us from the Sudan! At an earlier stage in the study, Professors David Card, now at the University of California at Berkeley, and Orley Ashenfelter of Princeton University, contributed to the shaping of the research design.

Robert K. Merton of Columbia University and Arnold Rampersad of Princeton University provided knowing advice concerning the title of the book and the preface. Alan Rosenbaum, Director of the Art Museum at Princeton, was heroic in his efforts to find just the right cover illustration (he succeeded, we think).

In our initial efforts to collect institutional records, we were joined by an exceptional group of people at the twenty-eight participating institutions, many of whom worked nights and weekends to generate the raw files we needed. It is only limitations of space that prevent us from thanking each of them, and their presidents, for having had the faith to participate so actively in the construction of the C&B database.

The survey component of the database, which plays such a vital role in the analysis, could not have been created without the thoughtful contributions of Herbert Abelson of the Survey Research Center of Princeton University and Geraldine Mooney and her colleagues at Mathematica Policy Research (the entity that administered the surveys so successfully, as is documented in Appendix A). We also want to thank the forty-five thousand individuals who took the time to complete the surveys so carefully and often volunteered additional comments. Many of these former students obviously care, and care deeply, about the questions we have been studying.

As a companion project, the Foundation commissioned the creation of a national control group survey (described in Appendix A); Norman Bradburn and Allen Sanderson of the National Opinion Research

Center in Chicago did yeoman work in completing this part of the project.

We were also able to link the core of the C&B database to two other large databases that complemented the information we were able to collect directly. Donald Stewart and his colleagues at the College Entrance Examination Board and the Educational Testing Service, and Alexander Astin, Director of the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, and his colleagues at the Cooperative Institutional Research Project, understood what we were trying to accomplish and were determined to help. In addition, Linda Wightman, former Vice President of the Law School Admission Council and now a faculty member at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, went to extra efforts to provide detailed data on law school students.

In order to learn more at first hand about the interest of businesses and professional associations in the recruitment of minority students, we contacted many knowledgeable individuals. Thomas Schick at American Express, Ira Millstein and Marsha Simms at Weil Gotschal & Manges, Jeffrey Brinck and Christina Wagner at Milbank Tweed Hadley & McCloy, Richard Fisher and Marilyn Booker at Morgan Stanley, and Marc Lackritz at the Securities Industry Association in Washington, D.C., were all extremely generous with their time. Subsequently, Glenda Burkhart has been responsible for involving representatives of the business, professional, and academic communities in thinking about the implications of this research.

We have been fortunate, too, in our publisher. Walter Lippincott, Peter Dougherty, Neil Litt, and their colleagues at Princeton University Press made it clear from the outset that for them this project was in no way "business as usual." They have worked diligently to publish a complex book at their usual high standard under extraordinary time constraints.

Finally, we wish to thank the Trustees of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for their appreciation of what we have tried to do, their financial support, and their understanding (nay, their insistence) that we would, of course, come to our own conclusions. The arguments developed in this book represent our own thinking, and none of the Trustees of the Foundation, nor any of the others who provided so much advice and help, should be implicated in the results. Whatever faults remain, despite the efforts of so many to "get it right," are solely our responsibility.

William G. Bowen
Derek Bok

May 1998

THE SHAPE OF THE RIVER

CHAPTER 7

Looking Back: Views of College

A NUMBER of critics of race-sensitive admissions argue—as Dinesh D'Souza has done in *Illiberal Education*—that "American universities are quite willing to sacrifice the future happiness of many young blacks and Hispanics to achieve diversity, proportional representation, and what they consider to be multicultural progress." As we have stressed throughout this book, the experiences of black students admitted to the College and Beyond schools in 1976 and 1989 suggest another point of view. Their graduation rates and (in the case of the '76 matriculants) subsequent life histories speak for themselves. But have these students borne other costs? Has the diversity of viewpoints that they brought to campus come at the expense of their own educational experience? "Would not these students be much better off," as D'Souza asked, ". . . where they might settle in more easily [and] compete against evenly-matched peers?"[1]

Although the advanced degrees that individuals have received, the amount of money that they earn, and the civic activities in which they are involved reveal particular facts about their life stories, people's perceptions of their experiences constitute a different "reality" that is also important. Some, in looking back at a childhood that had all the external trappings of a traditionally happy time—birthday parties, loving parents, and a nice house—may still not remember it as a happy time; in such cases, all of the externally verifiable facts are in one sense irrelevant. When we set out to assess how people who attended the C&B colleges and universities fared in life, we wanted to discover not only the objective facts of their histories but also the impact that college had on their subjective evaluations of their own lives. In considering the value of educational experiences—and especially those of minority students—we wanted to know how these former students themselves assess what they learned and whether they believe, looking back, that they made the right choice in attending a selective college.

We begin by examining how satisfied the C&B students were with their undergraduate education some twenty years after they matriculated. Were African Americans less satisfied than whites? Were the '89 matriculants more or less satisfied than those who entered college thirteen

[1] D'Souza 1991, pp. 40, 43.

years earlier? How strongly were SAT scores and rank in class correlated with students' satisfaction?

We are also interested in the "regrets" expressed by these former students. How many would have chosen a different school if they were able to make the choice again? Would they have selected a different major? Would they have spent more or less time studying, socializing, or participating in various extracurricular activities? Finally, we want to know what types of skills these former students regard as important in life and how much they feel that their college experience developed these capacities. By linking recent responses to information volunteered by the same individuals when they took their SAT tests, we can compare what students said they needed to learn when they entered college in 1976 and what they believe—twenty years later—they did learn.

SATISFACTION WITH COLLEGE

Overall Measures

The '76 C&B matriculants overwhelmingly expressed satisfaction with their undergraduate education. Over 60 percent were "very satisfied," nearly 90 percent were either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied, and only 6 percent were dissatisfied (Appendix Table D.7.1). These figures are especially striking since they refer to the school at which the student first enrolled and include not only those who graduated from this school, but also those who transferred to other schools from which they subsequently graduated, as well as those who never received a BA from any school. Predictably, students who finished at the C&B schools they entered originally were more positive in their evaluations than students who left prior to graduation. Two-thirds of the matriculants who graduated from their first school were "very satisfied," as contrasted with 40 percent of those who transferred and graduated from other schools and 32 percent of those who dropped out and did not graduate from any school.

This is the pattern that one would expect to find, since decisions to transfer or drop out were presumably often motivated by disappointment with some aspect of the school that the student first entered.[2] What is surprising is that three-quarters of the transfer graduates were either "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" with their *first* school; similarly, of

[2] In most instances, it is difficult to identify with precision the reasons why students left their first schools. As noted in Chapter 3, our own attempts to determine how many matriculants failed to meet course requirements, or were asked by the first school to leave for disciplinary reasons, were not very successful.

the drop-outs who did not graduate elsewhere, 71 percent said that they were either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied (Appendix Table D.7.1). Many decisions to transfer or drop out were probably precipitated by financial, educational, health, or other personal problems that did not reflect adversely on the school. The point to emphasize is that the degree of satisfaction expressed by students who graduated from the school they first entered (the group on which we focus throughout much of the chapter), differs only in small measure from the degree of satisfaction expressed by all matriculants.

While there are some differences, responses do not vary markedly by race or gender. Both black and white matriculants, women and men, expressed high degrees of satisfaction with their undergraduate education. In the '76 cohort, slightly higher percentages of white than black matriculants were either "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied," but the differences are negligible (Figure 7.1, top panel). Of all black matriculants—including those who transferred and those who never received a BA—only 6 percent expressed any degree of dissatisfaction, and only 1 to 2 percent were "very dissatisfied." The corresponding percentages for white matriculants are almost identical.

The '89 C&B matriculants express, if anything, even more satisfaction with their education than their predecessors in the '76 cohort. In all four subgroups—black men and black women, white men and white women—the percentages of matriculants responding "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" are higher in the '89 cohort than in the '76 cohort (Figure 7.1, bottom panel, and Appendix Table D.7.1). In general, levels of satisfaction increased by 2 to 7 percentage points between the two cohorts; the gains are larger among black males than they are among any other group.

This increase in reported satisfaction with college from the '76 to the '89 cohort is somewhat surprising, since it might seem that those away from college longer (who have been, overall, very successful in life) would be more inclined to look back favorably on their college experiences than those who left school more recently and may be less certain what the future holds. Of course, external factors may have been responsible. Over time, student populations, schools, and the society around them change (immediate post-college job opportunities, for example, may be better for '89 matriculants than they were for '76 matriculants). Since we have no way of distinguishing among these many factors, we are not inclined to put great weight on the small differences in the results for the '76 and '89 cohorts. Perhaps the main value of the '89 figures is to confirm the broad patterns evident in the '76 data and to suggest that there has been no fall off in satisfaction among the more recent entering cohorts.

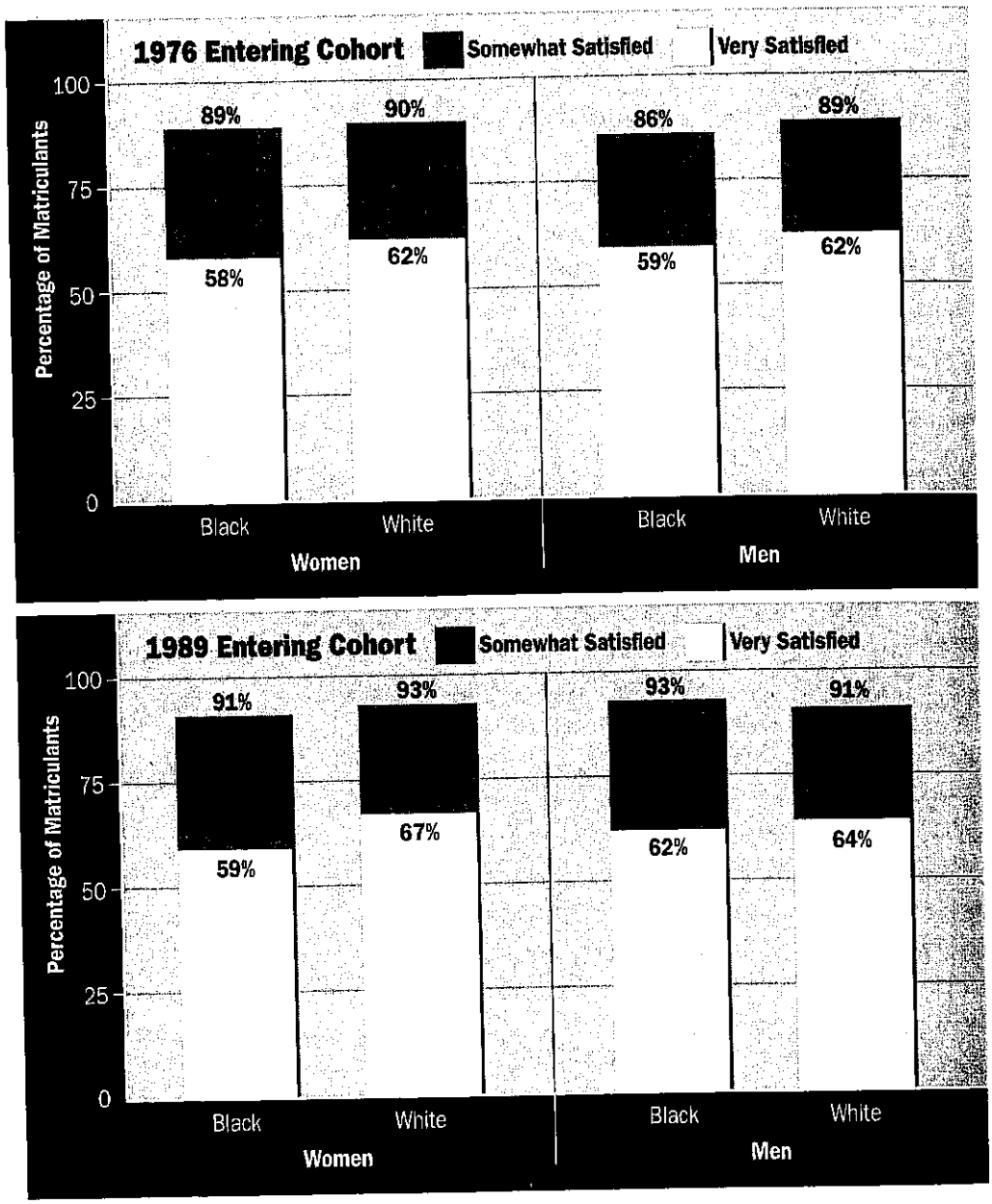

Figure 7.1. Percentage of Matriculants "Somewhat Satisfied" or "Very Satisfied" with College, by Race and Gender, 1976 and 1989 Entering Cohorts

Source: College and Beyond.

Black-White Comparisons

The small black-white differences that we found when we considered the responses of all matriculants disappear almost entirely when we focus on what is in some ways a group better positioned to assess their overall educational experience—those who stayed at the schools they first en-

tered, chose majors, and graduated.[3] Roughly two-thirds (65 percent) of all black graduates in the '76 C&B cohorts were "very satisfied" with the colleges they attended; 67 percent of the white graduates felt the same way. This difference of 2 percentage points is cut to 1 percentage point after we control for differences in grades and other "in-college" variables and later life outcomes, such as household income. There is no statistically significant relationship between race and satisfaction with college among the members of this cohort—or among the members of the '89 cohort.[4]

As we reported in the last chapter, the black men and women who entered the selective C&B schools in 1976 were, on average, appreciably less satisfied with their lives than were their white classmates; the resonance of this finding was amplified by the fact that most of this gap in life satisfaction remained even when the marks of accomplishment (advanced degrees and differences in earnings) were taken into account. We now see that no such gap exists when the same people are asked about their satisfaction with college. The black men and women who graduated from the C&B institutions apparently feel very differently about their college experiences than they do about their lives in general. This disjunction between satisfaction with college and satisfaction with life is even more pronounced when we classify black students by the selectivity of the schools they attended. Those who attended the SEL-1 schools, who were least satisfied with their lives, were most satisfied with their college

[3] This approach has the advantage, among others, of allowing us to compare the responses given by students who majored in different fields, earned different grades, and were at the schools they were asked to evaluate long enough to be in a position to comment on mentoring relationships, the amount of time they spent studying, and other questions of interest. We lack key pieces of information about those who dropped out. Nonetheless, we wanted to begin this analysis by being as inclusive as possible and asking about the views of those who transferred or dropped out altogether, as well as the views of those who finished the course of study. In the C&B student population, the graduates are, of course, the dominant group in terms of relative numbers, and, as we have seen, there is surprisingly little overall difference in the degree of satisfaction expressed by the graduates and by all matriculants: the overall percentage very satisfied rises by roughly 5 to 6 percentage points, from about 62 percent to 67 percent, when we consider graduates only.

[4] In both sets of regressions, the coefficients for the black variable were smaller than their standard errors (Appendix Tables D.7.2 and D.7.3). In the model 5 regressions, we include advanced degrees; we also include sector of employment and household earnings as control variables for the 1976 cohort, but not the 1989 cohort. The reason for including these post-college measures is that how individuals feel about their college experiences may be affected by whether they think that college helped them attain advanced degrees, work in the sector of their choice, or be well off financially. In any case, the results are essentially the same with or without these controls.

experience; conversely, those who attended the SEL-3 schools were more content with their post-college lives but less enthusiastic about their college experiences.[5]

SAT Scores and School Selectivity

For all students in both the '76 and '89 cohorts, there is a very slight positive relationship between SAT scores and satisfaction with college. This correlation, which is weak for all students, is non-existent for black students considered separately. Moreover, the overall pattern disappears even among whites when we control for school selectivity and other variables (Appendix Tables D.7.2 and D.7.3).

It is instructive to explore further the relationship between the SAT scores of individual black students, the selectivity of the schools that they attended, and how satisfied these students were with their college experience. In this way, we can test directly another variant of the "fit" hypothesis—the assertion that black students with academic credentials less impressive than those of their white classmates are likely to end up as "victims" of affirmative action policies. This question can be posed, in effect, to the black students themselves. Were students with SAT scores distinctly lower than the norm at their schools less satisfied with their educational experience than students who went to colleges or universities where there were larger numbers of other students with similar scores—where they might be presumed to have found a better "fit" from the standpoint of academic preparation?

As we can see from the data presented in Figure 7.2 (and Appendix Table D.7.4), there is no support for the "fit" hypothesis. More specifically:

- Within the C&B universe, the percentage of black graduates with SATs below 1000 who report that they are "very satisfied" with their undergraduate education is far higher among those who attended the more academically selective colleges and universities than it is among those who attended the SEL-3 institutions.
- More generally, we see that within *every* SAT interval, black students in the '89 cohort were more likely to express a high level of satisfaction with their undergraduate education if they attended one of the most selective colleges or universities. The pattern is more mixed in the '76 cohort, but there is certainly no evidence that black students at the most selective schools were less satisfied

[5] See Appendix Tables D.6.8 and D.7.4.

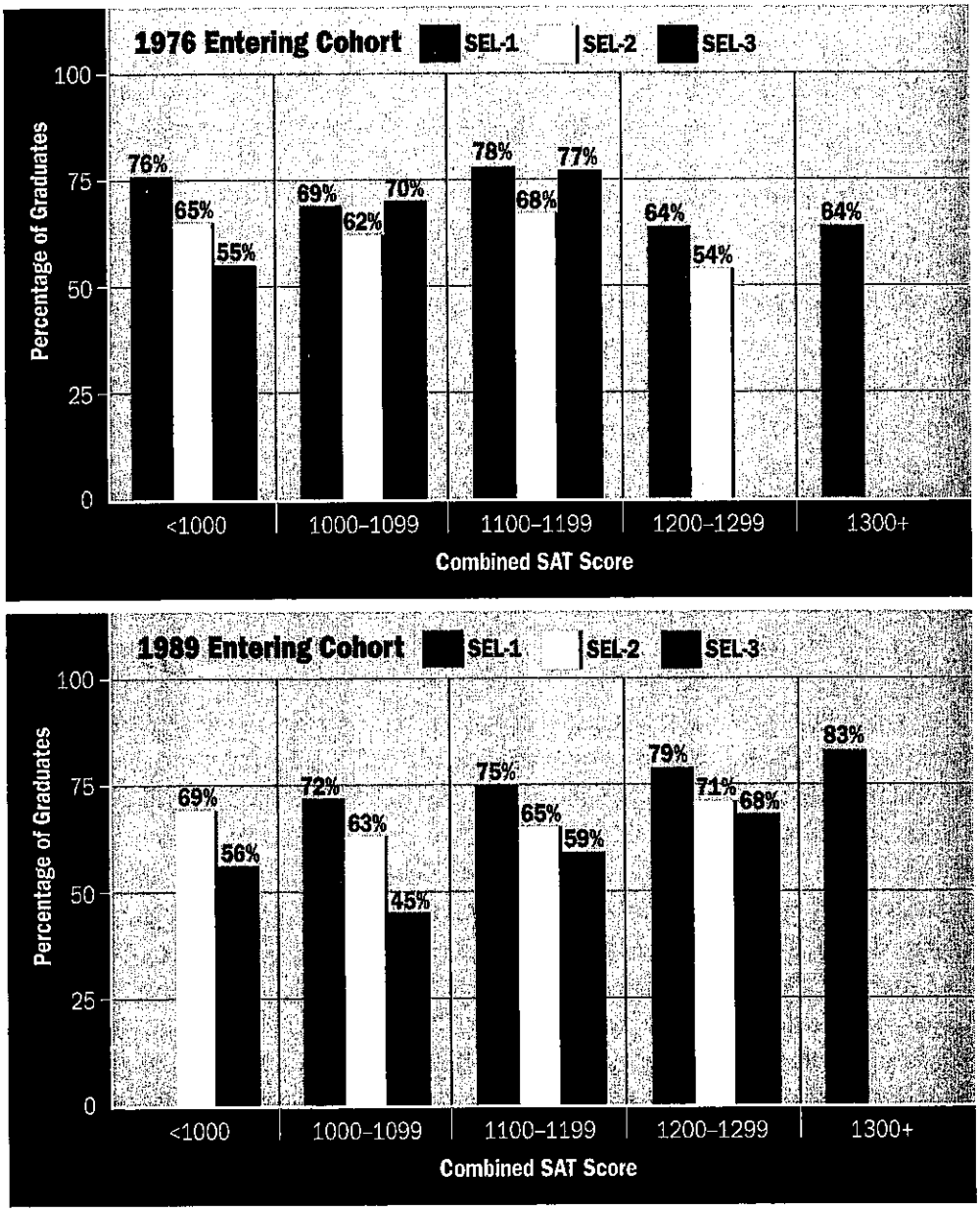

Figure 7.2. Percentage of Black Graduates "Very Satisfied" with College, by Institutional Selectivity and SAT Score, 1976 and 1989 Entering Cohorts

Source: College and Beyond.

Notes: "Graduates" refers to first-school graduates. For 1976, "SEL-1," "SEL-2," and "SEL-3" indicate institutions for which the mean combined SAT scores were 1250 or more, between 1125 and 1249, and below 1125, respectively. For 1989, "SEL-1," "SEL-2," and "SEL-3" indicate institutions for which the mean combined SAT scores were 1300 or more, between 1150 and 1299, and below 1150, respectively. Some bars are omitted because the category contained fewer than 20 observations.

than those at the less selective schools. If the black graduates, especially those with relatively low test scores, suffered by dint of having been admitted to the most academically demanding colleges and universities, they certainly don't seem to know it![6]

For white students as well as black students, the more selective the college, the more satisfied the graduates. We do not suggest, however, that the degree of selectivity per se is the main explanation. Schools with high average SAT scores tend to have more financial resources and to be able to afford faculty, facilities, and other amenities of distinctly above-average quality. Whatever the underlying forces at work, the percentage of "very satisfied" responses for the '76 cohort reaches 73 percent at SEL-1 schools, declines to 68 percent at SEL-2 schools, and drops again to 63 percent at SEL-3 schools. The differences in degree of satisfaction associated with school selectivity are at least as pronounced among black graduates as they are among white graduates, and the patterns for the '89 cohort are very similar (Appendix Table D.7.5).

These patterns do not pertain only to those who graduated from these schools. When we looked separately at matriculants who graduated neither from their first schools nor from any other school, we found that the black dropouts from both the SEL-1 and SEL-2 schools were more satisfied with their college experience than were the white dropouts from these schools; at the SEL-3 schools, the percentages were the same. In short, there is no evidence that black students who did not attain a BA felt "victimized" in a way that white students did not; if anything, the black students look back more favorably on their college experience.

The central conclusion is clear: a highly competitive academic environment was certainly not a problem for the overwhelming majority of matriculants, black and white, at the C&B schools. On the contrary, judging by their own expressions of satisfaction, it is those students who attended

[6] We also observe that black graduates were most likely to be "very satisfied" with their undergraduate education if they went to a C&B school that was either highly selective or relatively small in size. There are exceptions to this generalization, but there are not many. There are eight colleges and universities in the C&B universe where the percentage of black graduates in the '76 cohort classifying themselves as "very satisfied" was at least 5 percentage points *higher* than the comparable percentage for white graduates: of these, 6 are liberal arts colleges and 2 are private universities. In both the most selective universities and the colleges, it is the black *men* who are most satisfied. It is possible that institutions with large student bodies may have seemed more impersonal, and that this attribute could have been especially problematic for some minority students. Results of logistic regressions support this interpretation. When we added size-of-school variables, we found negative correlations between these variables and degree of satisfaction.

the most academically competitive institutions who were the most satisfied with their undergraduate educational experience. This finding, evident in the simple tabulations, is confirmed when we control for other variables (Appendix Tables D.7.2 and D.7.3).

Rank in Class

The relationship between being "very satisfied with college" and grades earned in college is also revealing (see the lower portion of the bars in Figure 7.3). For white and black students, in both the '76 and '89 cohorts, satisfaction with college is consistently highest for those with the best grades, and so on down the scale.[7] The members of what some used to refer to as the "contented bottom third," with their "Gentlemen's Cs," may indeed be content (with slightly over half of them "very satisfied"), but they are less content than their classmates with better grades. For black students, there is an even larger gap in satisfaction between those who ranked in the middle third of the class (80 percent "very satisfied" in the '76 cohort and 75 percent in the '89 cohort) and those who were in the bottom third (57 percent "very satisfied" in '76 and 61 percent in '89). This differential is further evidence that academic achievement not only matters for all students, it seems to matter especially for black students.[8]

As was the case with school selectivity, the simple relationship between satisfaction and rank in class is clear and does not change when we control for other variables. However, the direction of causation is less obvious. Does modest academic performance lead to feelings of relative dissatisfaction with college, even after the passage of some years, or does relative dissatisfaction with some aspect of college affect a student's grades? We leave to others, and to another day, the parsing out of such

[7] The only "blip" occurs for black graduates in the '76 cohort who ranked in the top third of the class; these students were less satisfied than black graduates from their cohort who ranked in the middle third, but this apparent anomaly disappears in the '89 cohort, where the same regular relationship between grades and satisfaction with college holds over all grade intervals for both black and white graduates.

[8] We should be careful, however, not to exaggerate the magnitude of this effect: 91 percent of all black graduates in the '76 cohort who finished in the bottom third of the class were either "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" with their undergraduate education, as compared with 90 percent of all white graduates in the bottom third of the class. The corresponding percentages in the '89 cohort are even higher: 93 percent for black graduates in the bottom third of the class and 90 percent for white graduates with comparable rank in class (see Figure 7.3).

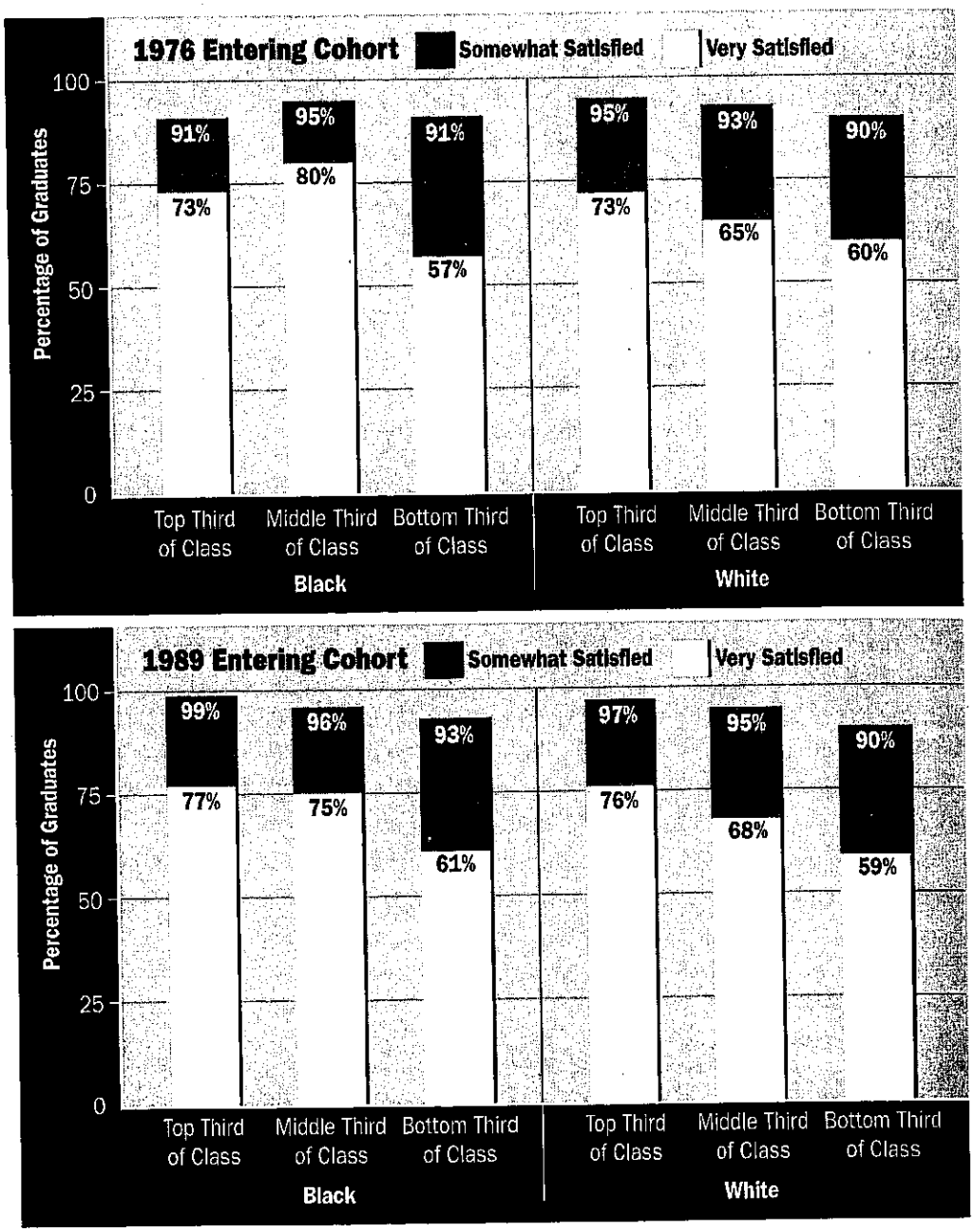

Figure 7.3. Percentage of Graduates "Very Satisfied" with College, by Class Rank and Race, 1976 and 1989 Entering Cohorts

Source: College and Beyond.

Note: "Graduates" refers to first-school graduates.

interactions. What can be said with confidence is that academic performance, in these avowedly academic institutions, is an important predictor of satisfaction with college, over both the short-term and the long-term.

Mentoring

Another factor that might be expected to affect satisfaction with college is the help and attention students received from "mentors." The percentage of graduates of C&B schools in the '76 cohort who said that there was someone who took a special interest in them, and to whom they could turn for advice or support, was higher for blacks than it was for whites: 55 percent versus 47 percent.[9] In the '89 cohort, even higher percentages of both black and white graduates reported having mentors: 70 percent of black graduates and 59 percent of their white classmates (Appendix Table D.7.6).

The types of people who served as mentors are also of interest. When asked who served in this capacity, 84 percent of white students with mentors in the '76 cohort cited faculty members, as compared with only 66 percent of black students. On the other hand, 39 percent of black students with mentors cited college deans or other administrators, as compared with 15 percent of white students. This finding offers strong support for the proposition that efforts to help black matriculants make the transition to academically demanding colleges and succeed there have been "top down" in some measure, with deans and other administrators devoting relatively more time and attention to this process than many faculty members.[10] Athletic coaches were also more commonly cited by black men than by white men (16 percent of those with mentors

[9] The precise wording of the question was: "While you were an undergraduate, did anyone associated with your school, other than fellow students, take a special interest in you or your work—that is, was there someone you could turn to for advice or for general support or encouragement?" See Appendix Table D.7.6 for a summary of responses to this question and to the follow-up question asking about the types of individuals who provided such assistance. The difference in overall percentages between black and white graduates is statistically significant at the 1 percent level of confidence.

[10] Lowe (forthcoming). There are relatively more black deans and other administrators than black faculty, and this could also be part of the explanation for the black/white disparity in mentoring percentages. Some black deans were, of course, recruited precisely because of the relative lack of black faculty and the desirability of having some number of black adults in the academic community.

versus 9 percent)—a pattern that is reversed among the women.[11] Finally, black graduates were almost twice as likely as white graduates to cite alumni/ae as sources of advice and support, a result that we believe reflects the special efforts of alumni/ae recruiters at many of these colleges to identify promising black candidates and then to follow their progress. The fact that alumni/ae bodies at all of these colleges remain predominantly white suggests that this pattern cannot be explained primarily in terms of the efforts of black graduates.

The difference a faculty mentor can make is illustrated by this recollection of a black woman in the '89 cohort at Princeton who is now in medical school:

I had a religion professor . . . who was a huge influence on me. We disagreed a lot. So in disagreeing, we basically forged a medium through which we could really carry out our conversation and fight it out. We always ended up agreeing to disagree but it was good for me, because it allowed me to understand that it's okay to believe something other than what the professor is saying. In [my] Haitian culture, if you disagree with your elders, you're not supposed to say anything. It was difficult to start in this mode. In class one day early on, he [the religion professor] saw that I wasn't saying anything and he asked me—in French—"What do you think?" So I told him that he knew that I couldn't say anything because I disagreed—he clearly knew about my culture. And he said, "No, this is different. You should say what you believe." Throughout college, he would check on me and say, "Are you remembering to say what you think?" He's the one who ultimately made me realize that at Princeton, you have to talk. Otherwise people won't know that you understand the issue at hand or that you have your own opinion. I'm glad—if I hadn't had his class during the first year, then I probably would have been more quiet in the subsequent years than I actually was at the end.

The likelihood of having a mentor depended on the type of school attended. Within the '76 cohort, 62 percent of all graduates and 64 percent of black graduates from liberal arts colleges reported that there was someone who took a special interest in them. At the large public universities, a considerable amount of mentoring also occurred, with 40 percent of all graduates, and 52 percent of black graduates, identifying one

[11] The main difference between the '76 and '89 cohorts in types of mentors is that the relative number of faculty mentors apparently declined for white graduates (Appendix Table D.7.6).

or more individuals to whom they could turn for advice and support. The private universities are intermediate in this regard, but closer to the public universities than to the liberal arts colleges. These data show that liberal arts colleges, with their relatively small enrollments, offer personal support to especially large numbers of their students. It is particularly noteworthy that of those liberal arts college graduates who had mentors, 90 percent had faculty mentors. We regard all these percentages as encouraging, in light of what is sometimes said about the allegedly impersonal nature of much of higher education.

As one would predict, students who had mentors were definitely more likely to be "very satisfied with college" than those who did not. This pattern holds for the '76 and '89 cohorts, for all gender/race subgroups, and after controlling for other variables (Appendix Tables D.7.2 and D.7.3). Of course it is possible that students who were destined to end up being very satisfied with college were more inclined than their classmates to seek out and find mentors. But it also seems likely that attentive advising, counseling, and the simple provision of encouragement and support made some difference in the lives of many of these students. There is much anecdotal evidence to support this commonsense observation.

REGRETS

We also asked the members of the '76 and '89 cohorts more specific questions about what they would have done differently if they had known earlier what they know now and had their lives to live over again. Specifically, they were asked if they would change their choice of college, choice of major, or allocation of time while in college. For reasons explained in the previous section, we focus on the responses of graduates in presenting results. We did, however, tabulate the responses for matriculants as well, and when we also include those who either transferred or dropped out, the frequency of "regrets" naturally goes up, but generally only by about 3 or 4 percentage points.

Choice of School

As one would expect, there is a strong association between the degree of satisfaction students feel toward their college experience and their likelihood of choosing the same college again. There are, however, some differences in patterns between the '76 and '89 cohorts.

Within the '76 cohort, 57 percent of the black graduates of the C&B schools say that they would be very likely to enroll at the same college

again, and only 14 percent say that they would be unlikely ("not at all likely") to do so. For white C&B graduates, the corresponding percentages of those very likely to enroll again and those unlikely to do so are 64 percent and 10 percent. The members of the '89 cohort were even more inclined to reaffirm their original choice of school: 72 percent of black graduates and 74 percent of white graduates said that they would be very likely to choose the same school again; only 6 to 7 percent say that they would be unlikely to make the same choice again (Appendix Table D.7.7).

Responses vary according to the selectivity and the type of school attended. In general, graduates of the most selective institutions (SEL-1 schools) would be most strongly inclined to go back to the same school. Otherwise, much depends not just on the selectivity of the school but on its type (college or university, private or public). Two findings stand out:

- First, whereas a somewhat higher percentage of graduates of liberal arts colleges than of private universities said that they were "very satisfied" with college (73 percent versus 67 percent), a higher percentage of the private university graduates said that they would be "very likely" to choose the same college again (63 percent versus 59 percent for the liberal arts colleges). These patterns apply to white and black graduates alike (see Appendix Tables D.7.5 and D.7.7). Apparently some number of the liberal arts college graduates, while very satisfied with their undergraduate education, would now prefer to have gone to a different kind of institution, perhaps one with a wider range of curricular offerings.[12]
- Second, the public universities received relatively higher scores on "very likely to choose the same college" than they did on "very satisfied with the undergraduate education." We interpret this relationship as testimony to the bargain that first-rate public universities, of the kind included in the C&B universe, offer to their matriculants. These schools provide very strong academic programs at tuition levels far below those at more or less comparable private institutions.[13]

[12] A member of the '76 cohort at one college commented in an interview, "I can say in hindsight that if I had it to do over again, I don't know if I'd go to a liberal arts college. The way that the market is today you really have to have skills. I see people who majored in computer science and financially they're doing much better than I am. If I send my daughter to [the same college], I'd want her to do something where she'd be very marketable—science, health, fields where there will be good jobs. It's so hard these days—there's no such thing as job security anymore. One day you have a job and the next day you're told that the company is downsizing."

[13] The difference in responses to the combination of satisfaction and choice-of-college questions is evident primarily among the white graduates of the public universities. It

How are regrets about choice of school related to SAT scores? In particular, is there any evidence that appreciable numbers of black graduates of the most selective schools, who entered with modest SAT scores, have had second thoughts about their choice of school? The answer is a flat no. At the most selective institutions, only 10 percent of black graduates from the '76 cohort with SAT scores between 1000 and 1099 would be "not at all likely" to go to the same college again—and the percentage is even lower among the '89 matriculants (5 percent). The percentage of black graduates with 1000–1099 SAT scores who expressed regrets about choice of college is highest (17 percent) at the SEL-3 schools and at the liberal arts colleges (both 18 percent). These schools may have admitted some black students who were not happy there, and who, in retrospect, regretted their choices—but the numbers are small. And the same patterns exist for white graduates.

In contrast to SAT scores, class rank is clearly related to regrets about choice of college. As one would expect, black students in the bottom third of the class were more likely than other students to regret their choice of college. Once again, doubts about choice of college among low-ranking students were greater among those who attended the schools in the SEL-3 category. Even here, however, the percentage expressing "regrets" (respondents who would be not at all likely to go back to the same college) never rises above 19 percent among the black graduates of the '76 cohort—or above roughly the 11 percent level among black graduates of the '89 cohort. And, again, the same patterns emerge when we look at the views that white students express concerning their choice of school.

Choice of Major

Many more alumni/ae have regrets about their choice of major than about their choice of school. In the '76 cohort, 29 percent of all black graduates and 21 percent of all white graduates say that they would be "not at all likely" to choose the same major again, and only 36 percent of the black graduates and 41 percent of the white graduates say that they would be "very likely" to choose the same major. In the '89 cohort, smaller

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probably reflects the fact that white matriculants were less likely than black matriculants to qualify for need-based financial aid at the expensive private institutions (because of their generally higher levels of household income) and therefore were more likely to have to pay full tuition, or something close to it, at those schools. In answering the question about "choosing the same college again," respondents might well give some weight to tuition levels, whereas they would be less likely to do so in answering the "satisfaction" question.

percentages of the graduates, both black and white, expressed dissatisfaction with their choice of major; 19 percent of black graduates and 16 percent of whites said that they would be unlikely to choose the same major again (Appendix Table D.7.8.)

Regrets differ significantly by broad field of study, but we will not report these figures in any detail in the text because the patterns are erratic over time. Suffice it to say that in the '76 cohort, serious second thoughts were most common among graduates who majored in the social sciences. By the time of the '89 cohort, attitudes toward broad fields had changed in several respects. Most notably, those '89 matriculants (both black and white) who majored in the humanities are much more positive about this choice of major than were their predecessors (see Appendix Table D.7.8 for more detail).

Allocation of Time

More than half (57 percent) of all black graduates in the '76 cohort felt that they didn't study enough while in college; 40 percent of their white classmates expressed the same regret. There are only slight differences in the responses to questions about time spent in other ways, such as on social life and extracurricular activities (Figure 7.4).[14] The relationships between "wishing I had studied more" and rank in class are relentlessly consistent for both white and black graduates, and for members of both the '76 and '89 cohorts. Overall, less than 20 percent of all those who graduated in the top third of the class now wish that they had studied more, whereas nearly half of those in the middle third and slightly more than two-thirds of those in the bottom third regretted not having spent more time "hitting the books" (Appendix Table D.7.9).

The greater (relative) number of black graduates who regret not having studied more is in large part related to their lower overall rank in class. But even when we limit the comparison to those who graduated in the top third of the class, we find that a higher percentage of black graduates than white graduates in the '89 cohort wish that they had studied more (25 percent versus 16 percent). These retrospective expressions of regret by African American respondents need to be thought about in the context of the debate over factors affecting their academic performance discussed in Chapter 3, and especially the suggestion that peer group pressures discourage studying.

[14] The members of the '89 cohort expressed essentially the same set of views; an even higher fraction of black graduates wished that they had studied more (65 percent). See Figure 7.4.

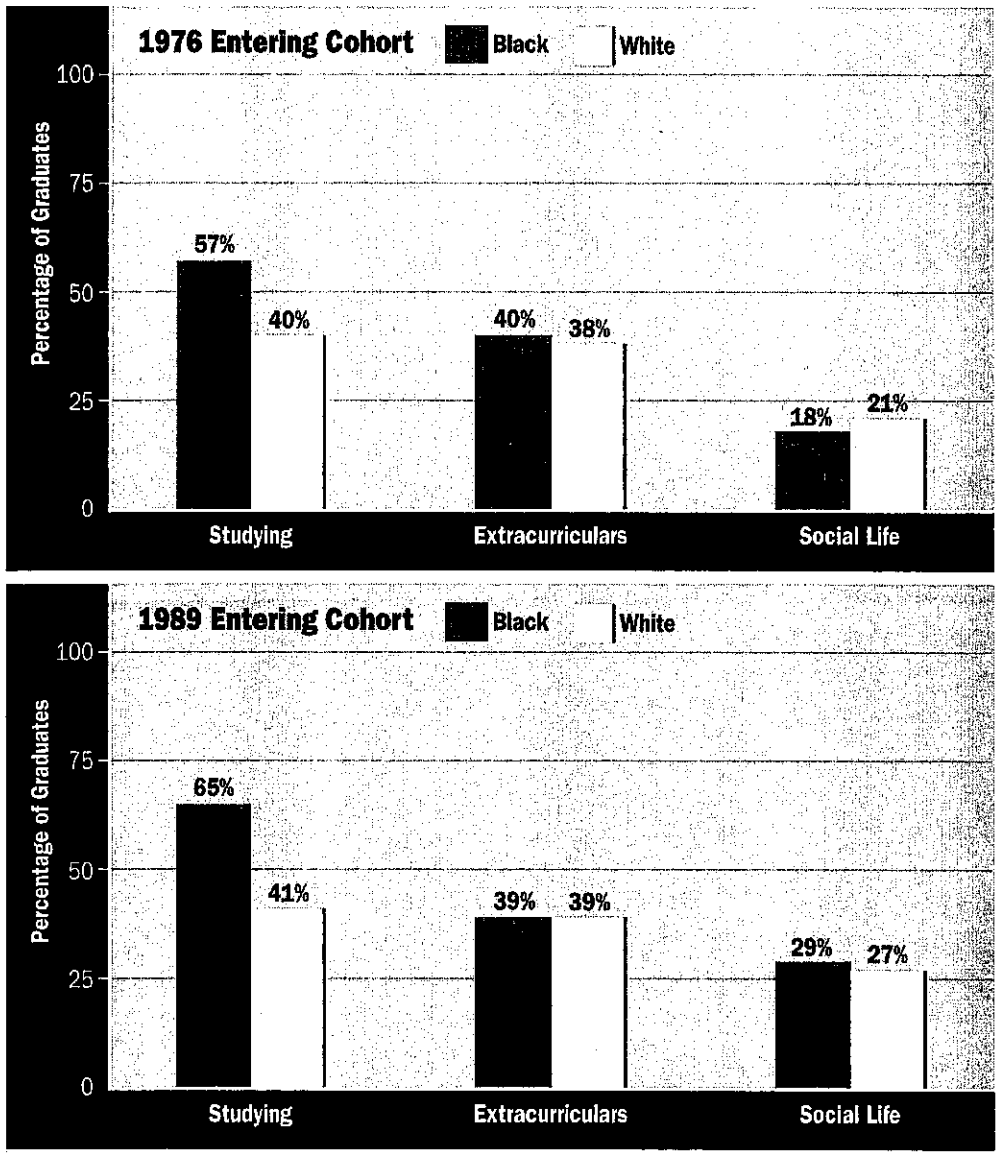

Figure 7.4. Percentage of Graduates Who Wish They Had Spent More Time on Selected Activities, by Race, 1976 and 1989 Entering Cohorts

Source: College and Beyond.

Note: "Graduates" refers to first-school graduates.

WHAT WAS LEARNED?

Undergraduate education at all of the C&B schools is intended both to build intellectual capital and to encourage personal growth. Which capacities do graduates consider most important, and to what degree do they credit their colleges with helping them develop these skills? To answer these questions, respondents to the C&B survey were given a list of

skills or capacities (including categories such as "analytical and problem-solving skills," "ability to write clearly," "ability to work independently," "ability to form and retain friendships," and "ability to have a good rapport with people holding different beliefs"). They were then asked, first, to indicate how important each has been in their life since college, and second, how much their undergraduate experience helped them develop in these areas. Responses were on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest rating.

There was substantial agreement among black and white graduates, in both the '76 and '89 cohorts, as to which of these skills had proved to be "very important" in their lives after college (Table 7.1). Analytical skills, the ability to write clearly, to communicate well orally, to work independently, and to adapt to change, were assigned especially high rankings by all graduates. More than 60 percent of black and white respondents in the '76 and '89 cohorts stated that each of these was "very important." One of the noteworthy features of the results reported in Table 7.1 is that more black graduates than white graduates felt that almost all of these skills/capacities were "very important" in their lives. We are not sure how to interpret this pattern, but it could simply mean that, after reflecting on their lives in a society in which race continues to matter, black graduates were more inclined than whites to think that they needed all the powers that they could command.

Of greater moment for this study are the responses to the second set of questions, which sought to ascertain how much students felt their undergraduate experience had contributed to their intellectual and personal development. Overall, black graduates rated their undergraduate experience more highly than did their white classmates (Table 7.2).[15] Only in "ability to form and retain friendships" and (for the '89 cohort only) "ability to relax and enjoy leisure" did white graduates rate the contribution of college more highly than black graduates. The differences in responses were especially large in the percentages who reported that college contributed "a great deal" to their "ability to communicate well orally," "ability to adapt to change," and "competitiveness."[16] Among the members of both the '76 and the '89 cohorts, black graduates were twice

[15] These ratings varied by type of school, but the black-white differences are quite consistent within each category. In general, the more selective schools and the liberal arts colleges as a group received the highest ratings—particularly in contributions to analytical skills, writing ability, and ability to work independently.

[16] These positive responses were not confined to graduates. The black matriculants who never received a BA consistently reported that their colleges contributed more in almost all of these dimensions than did the whites who never finished college.

TABLE 7.1
Percentage of Graduates Who Consider Selected Skills "Very Important" in Their Lives, by Race, 1976 and 1989 Entering Cohorts

	Percentage Rating Skill "Very Important"			
	1976 Entering Cohort		*1989 Entering Cohort*	
	Black	*White*	*Black*	*White*
Academic skills				
Analytical skills	87	85	83	83
Ability to communicate well orally	79	68	78	69
Ability to write clearly and effectively	71	65	68	62
Knowledge of particular field/discipline	46	43	45	43
Professional skills				
Ability to work independently	74	67	73	68
Ability to adapt to change	72	61	70	66
Leadership abilities	61	47	56	47
Ability to work cooperatively	56	50	61	58
Rapport with people holding different beliefs	53	45	60	56
Competitiveness	25	20	30	22
Personal/social skills				
Ability to form and retain friendships	41	44	53	57
Religious values	41	21	36	18
Ability to relax and enjoy leisure	40	33	47	45
Active interest in community service	24	15	29	14

Source: College and Beyond.
Note: "Graduates" refers to first-school graduates.

as likely as white graduates to emphasize the contribution of the college to developing an "active interest in community service." This finding supports our earlier conjecture that experiences in college contributed to the strong proclivity of black matriculants to participate in civic activities after college.

"Leadership skills" were also valued especially highly by black graduates in both cohorts, and anecdotal accounts make clear that access to these highly selective institutions helped them learn how to function—and how to lead—in multi-racial settings.

A black graduate of Northwestern who went on to earn an MD:

I was a leader of a number of organizations on campus. Most of that had to do with film—and I'm in medicine now, so that was going pretty far afield. Because I was the head of an organization that promoted films across campus, we had a large organization that was a money-making machine, and I was the head of it. I think I developed leadership qualities from doing that sort of thing, and that has served me well in college, in medical school, and beyond.

TABLE 7.2
Percentage of Graduates Who Believe College Contributed "a Great Deal" to the Development of Selected Skills, by Race, 1976 and 1989 Entering Cohorts

	Percentage Who Believe College Contributed a "Great Deal"			
	1976 Entering Cohort		*1989 Entering Cohort*	
	Black	*White*	*Black*	*White*
Academic skills				
Analytical skills	45	41	50	47
Ability to communicate well orally	27	17	33	25
Ability to write clearly and effectively	39	33	48	40
Knowledge of particular field/discipline	29	29	41	37
Professional skills				
Ability to work independently	42	36	42	40
Ability to adapt to change	26	17	38	30
Leadership abilities	19	12	27	23
Ability to work cooperatively	19	13	28	26
Rapport with people holding different beliefs	28	23	43	42
Competitiveness	28	20	29	24
Personal/social skills				
Ability to form and retain friendships	24	27	37	46
Religious values	8	4	11	7
Ability to relax and enjoy leisure	11	12	23	26
Active interest in community service	10	4	24	13

Source: College and Beyond.
Note: "Graduates" refers to first-school graduates.

There is a striking congruence between the rankings of skills that the graduates now regard as most important and the rankings of skills that college helped them develop in the fullest measure. In the main, these graduates appear to have taken from college the things that they now regard as most important in their lives.

A black man from the '89 entering class at Yale who now works as a talent agent:

I remember one literary criticism course where one of the main things we did was look at paragraphs and chapters as a stand-in for the whole text—so how does this sentence, this paragraph, represent the whole work? And that's something that I've done as I've looked at scripts here in Hollywood. It's a good way into the script, but I also have found that doing this sets me apart from other people who are talking in generalities and not in specifics. Who would have known that would have played a role in my career? But it has.

A black graduate of the University of Pennsylvania talked about perseverance, learned by studying math:

Mostly people were saying I couldn't do it. I had a hard time with math, even though I wanted to be an engineer. I didn't make it through because I was any kind of math whiz. I made it through because I basically said that I wasn't going to fail. And I just kept pushing. When I got into the first engineering class, the professor asked how many of us—and there were hundreds of us in the class—hadn't taken calculus. It was me and maybe a dozen other people that raised our hands. That was pretty intimidating, to say the least. But, it didn't stop me from giving it a shot. . . . I just always took math. Three years were required, and I ended up taking three and a half or four. The thing that I learned most was perseverance. Sticking with a problem until you solve it—that's about the most important thing that any engineer can learn.

Our findings take on even more meaning when considered in the context of how these C&B graduates rated themselves before they entered college as freshmen. Thanks to the cooperation of the College Entrance Examination Board and the Educational Testing Service (ETS), we were able to go back in time and examine how C&B graduates in the '76 cohort graded themselves in a number of academic and non-

academic categories when they took the SAT test in 1975 or 1976.[17] Not surprisingly, we found that the C&B graduates as a group were much more likely than all test-takers to rank their abilities in the top 1 percent or the top 10 percent of their age group. We also found that the black graduates of the C&B schools assigned themselves higher ratings in essentially every category than did all SAT test-takers (Appendix Table D.7.10),[18] but that the black C&B graduates were less inclined than their white classmates to rate themselves at the very top of these scales.

The College Board's Student Descriptive Questionnaire included questions about three important skills—written expression, spoken expression, and leadership abilities—that were also part of the C&B survey. This linkage permits us to ask whether students who entered college feeling they were not among those at the top of their peer group in these key areas now feel, looking back, that college contributed to their growth in these areas. Thus, we separated students into two groups: those who felt, when they took the SAT, that they were already in the top 10 percent in each of these categories, and all others. The second group we regarded collectively as having expressed, de facto, some "room to improve" in their writing, speaking, and leadership skills. Roughly 50 percent of the black graduates and 45 percent of the white graduates were in the "Below Top 10% (Room to Improve)" category when they completed the pre-college survey.[19]

Among the black students who classified themselves as having room to improve in writing skills, 33 percent felt that college contributed "a great deal" in this respect, as compared with 23 percent of their white classmates. When we add the next level of responses (also including those who ranked the contribution of college "4" on a scale of 1 to 5), the gap

[17] All prospective test-takers filled out a Student Descriptive Questionnaire prior to taking the SAT. These questionnaires garnered information about students' backgrounds, interests, aspirations, and self-ratings (see Appendix A and Appendix Table D.7.10). Working with the College Board and ETS, we were able to link the data collected by ETS to our database. Fortunately, some of the ETS categories—writing clearly, spoken expression, leadership skills—match our categories almost perfectly.

[18] There are two categories that are exceptions to this generalization: test-takers in general assigned themselves a slightly higher average rating in "mechanical ability" and "artistic ability" than did black C&B graduates. It can also be noted that in three categories, "getting along with others," "acting ability," and "leadership ability" black C&B graduates, on entering college in '76, rated themselves more highly than did their white classmates.

[19] These percentages vary by skill category, but not by much. The percentages who rated themselves "below top 10%" are, by category: written expression—49 percent of black graduates, 44 percent of white graduates; oral expression—52 percent of black graduates, 51 percent of white graduates; leadership abilities—43 percent of black graduates, 43 percent of white graduates.

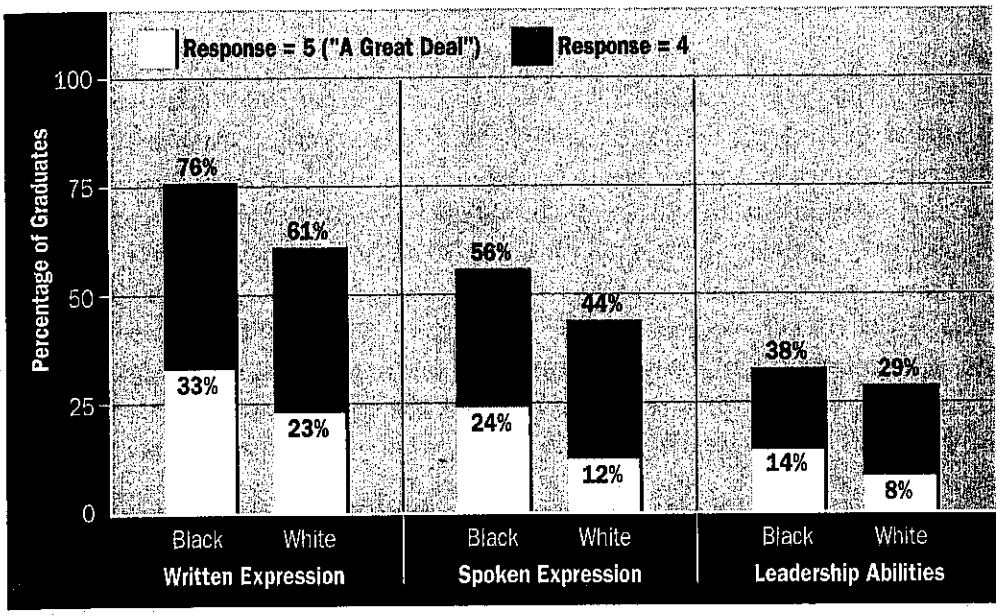

Figure 7.5. Percentage of Graduates with Low Self-Ratings Who Benefited from College in Selected Areas, by Race, 1976 Entering Cohort

Sources: College and Beyond and College Entrance Examination Board.

Notes: Graduates with "low self-ratings" in a selected area are those who rated their ability below the top 10 percent of their peers on a pre-college questionnaire administered by the College Entrance Examination Board. "Graduates" refers to first-school graduates.

between black and white students widens: 76 percent of black graduates as compared with 61 percent of white graduates. Similar gaps exist with respect to the other two skill categories common to both surveys, oral communication and leadership skills (Figure 7.5).

It is undoubtedly true that those graduates—black and white—who entered college with well-developed skills gained further strength in areas in which they already excelled. Those who had ranked themselves in the top 10 percent on entry to college reported even higher gains than those who gave themselves lower rankings (with black members of this top group even more likely than white members to credit college with having made a great deal of difference). There is everything to be said for enhancing talents already identified. But in some ways even more compelling is the evidence of the progress made by those who entered college with a lower level of confidence—conscious of their limits and lacking the conviction that they were already in the top 1 percent or top 10 percent of their age group. The black students who felt that they had room for improvement were much more likely than white students to rate the college contribution highly.

The twenty years between the time they entered college and the time of the C&B survey surely brought many changes in the lives of members of the '76 cohort that affected their self-images and colored their recollections of college. Nonetheless, the ETS pre-college data support the interpretation that more black graduates than white graduates have concluded—somehow, at some point—that college helped them develop critically important skills. How does one judge the worth of an increased capacity to exercise leadership or a greater degree of confidence in making a speech or presenting ideas in a meeting? No one can give precise answers to such questions. But what can be said on the basis of these data is that substantial numbers of C&B graduates—and relatively more black graduates than white graduates—felt that college made a difference.

This is the chapter of the study in which the former students speak for themselves. Because of the doubts some have expressed about the wisdom of enrolling black students in the competitive environment of selective colleges, what is most impressive about these retrospective evaluations is the high degree of satisfaction with college that these students reported. They felt much more positive about their educational experiences than they did about their lives in general.

Clearly, the black matriculants (and graduates) from the most selective institutions—even if they may at times have felt hard pressed academically—did not let such challenges defeat them. It is time, therefore, to abandon the idea that well-intentioned college and university admissions officers have somehow sacrificed the interests of the black students whom they have admitted. That is not the conclusion suggested by measures of graduation rates, advanced degrees, or subsequent earnings, and it is certainly not the view of the vast majority of the black students who were admitted. There are—and always will be—individual students, black and white, who feel underprepared for college and overmatched by their new academic environments; but anecdotal accounts of frustration and disappointment should not be allowed to substitute for the overwhelming weight of evidence based on the positive experiences of so many C&B matriculants.

At the same time, we find—and it is a reassuring finding for those who have been teachers and graded papers—that academic performance matters for all students, especially black students. Not surprisingly, students tend to be more satisfied with the quality of their undergraduate academic experience if they ranked higher than the lower third of the class—and those students who ranked in the top third were most satisfied

of all. This finding applies to all students, regardless of race. It should remind everyone concerned with teaching and academic advising that even more effort has to be devoted to encouraging all students, whatever their background or circumstances, to take full advantage of their educational opportunities.

Finally, it is especially heartening to learn from the data presented in the last part of this chapter that black students with specific educational needs believe that they have benefited at least as much as their white classmates, and probably more, from what these colleges seek to give their students. "Value added" is no doubt impossible to measure in any precise way, but the responses of the black graduates of the C&B institutions certainly encourage us to think that they have gained substantially from the time they spent in selective colleges and universities.