

# Supreme Court decision will affect admissions process at Elon, schools around the nation

**Brian Grady**  
Reporter

Administrators at universities throughout the country will be watching the Supreme Court closely this spring as it once again re-examines the role race is allowed to play in the college admissions process.

The court's ruling in two cases against the University of Michigan will have implications for all colleges that accept federal financial aid, including Elon and most other public and private universities in the country. Susan Klopman, Elon dean of Admissions and Financial Planning, said the ruling could potentially end the use of race as the sole basis for a student's admission over another equally qualified student.

"Currently, we operate in an environment that says race may be one of several factors considered," she said.

The court decided last December to hear the two cases being brought against the University of Michigan, which it will rule upon later this spring. The first case was filed by Barbara Grutter, a Michigan businesswoman. According to the Raleigh News & Observer, Grutter applied to the university's law school in 1997 with a 3.8 undergraduate grade point average and test scores in the 86th percentile. Although the law school accepted seven minority applicants with scores and GPAs comparable to Grutter's, she and 71 of the 88 white applicants with similar credentials were not admitted.

The second case being considered was filed by undergraduate applicant Jennifer Gratz, a white student who was rejected from Michigan despite having a 3.8 high school GPA. Some have speculated that the court is hearing cases pertaining to both the graduate and undergraduate levels to determine whether race-based decisions are more or less acceptable at undergraduate as opposed

to professional schools. It is not clear how the court will rule in either case, although President George W. Bush has weighed in against the university's policy.

The main reason Michigan has been targeted for its admissions policies is its use of a point system that gives more points to an applicant for being an African-American than for other factors like having a high SAT score. This imbalance, Klopman said, is an attempt by Michigan to balance out other factors, such as points awarded for familial relationships to the university, that often tip the scales unfairly in favor of whites.

However, Klopman said whatever Michigan's motives, the school has opened itself up to charges of abusing affirmative action.

"You've switched to a number, not a person," she said. "They just have gone too far in the quantifiable range."

Although race is a factor used in Elon's admissions process, Klopman said the school does not quantify students' qualities in the same way Michigan does.

"It definitely is more subjective, and we'd like to think it's a little more well-rounded because it is subjective," she said.

Klopman said that because Elon's process is more subjective and incorporates a number of factors, it will likely not be affected much by the Supreme Court's ruling one way or another.

"One of the reasons we might select a student is that they will bring diversity to campus, but that is not the only reason," she said. "I do not see Elon's world changing dramatically."

In Elon's admissions process, an applicant must first meet a few basic criteria, such as having taken the necessary core courses, having at least a 2.3 high school GPA and having an SAT score of 850 with neither a math nor a verbal score below 400. Beyond this, Elon looks at an applicant's academic record, talents, relationship to the institution, opportunity to

benefit from Elon and other factors like race.

"I'm a big believer in access to education," Klopman said. "I want to be able to take a student with a slightly different academic profile because they will bring something significant to this campus."

Klopman noted that Elon has also taken steps recently to improve the way it reaches out to minority students and applicants. One such step has been the addition of a minority recruitment counselor this year, who is working to increase the number of blacks and Hispanics who apply to Elon, and an increase in financial aid for minority students that was included in this year's recently approved budget.

Elon representatives have also traveled more and had more direct contact with minority students and applicants, Klopman said. This has led to an increase in the number of minorities applying to the university.

"Our efforts have been successful to this point," she said. "A higher number [of minorities] have been admitted, and now it's just up to the students."

Klopman said that although the school has worked hard to balance academics and diversity in the admissions process, there will always be room to improve.

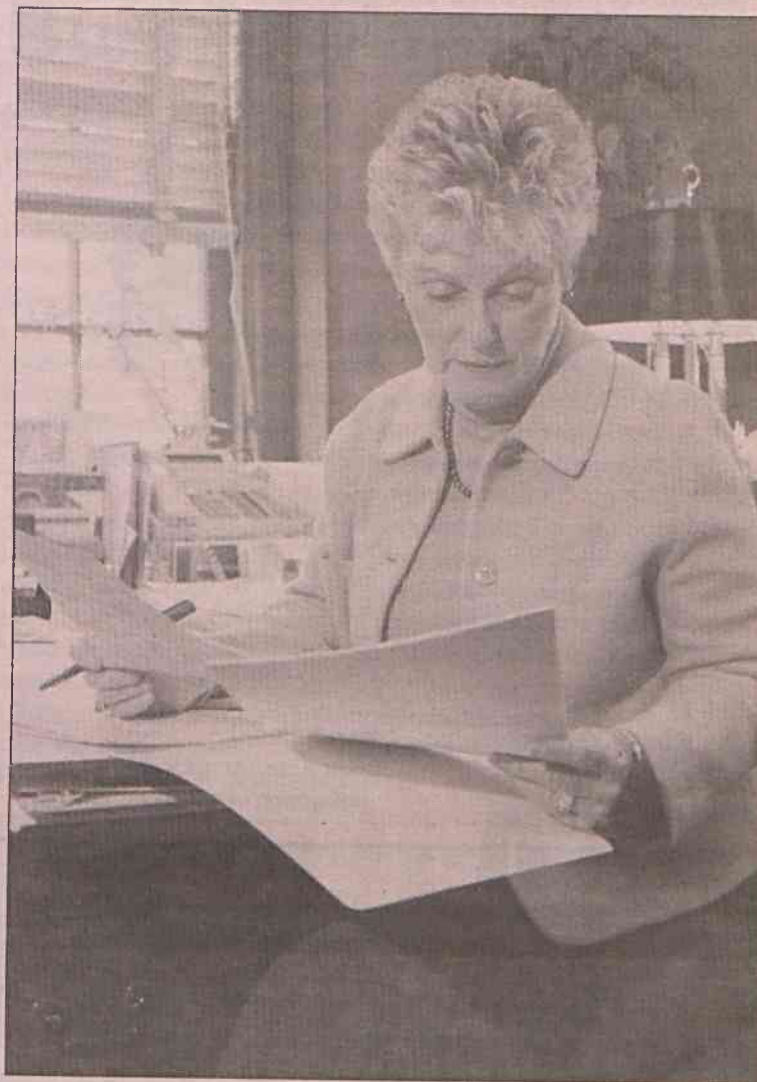
"Is it a point of conversation? Always, and I think it should be," she said. "I think the minute we stop paying attention to that, we stand to lose a lot."

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Tim Rosner / Photo Editor

Susan Klopman, dean of admissions and financial planning, reviews student applications. While Elon admission officers use race as a selection tool in the admissions process, they do so subjectively.

## CHRONOLOGY of key rulings

**Oct. 14, 1997:** Lawsuit filed against University of Michigan regarding undergraduate admissions process.

**Dec. 3, 1997:** Lawsuit filed against University of Michigan regarding Law School admissions process.

**Dec. 13, 2000:** Judge Duggan states diversity is a compelling governmental interest and the the University's current undergraduate admissions program currently meets standards set by the Supreme Court. He also ruled the admissions programs in 1995-1998 were, in fact, unconstitutional.