

The Bulletin

Class of 2028 Arrives, Impact of Affirmative Action Uncertain

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The Bulletin Editor

Oberlin's Class of 2028 began classes Aug. 29, a historic first group of students admitted under the absence of affirmative action. As other universities release demographic data following the Supreme Court ruling, ending affirmative action last summer, Oberlin College plans to publish official data later this fall.

Early statistics from other top U.S. institutions provide a glimpse into the impact of the Supreme Court's 2023 ruling. Over a year ago, the justices ruled in favor of Students for Fair Admissions, an organization taking legal action against affirmative action policies. The court held that race cannot be used as a factor in admissions decisions and that the use of race as a factor in admissions violates the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment.

Recently, Massachusetts Institute of Technology was one of the first institutions to release enrollment data. The administration revealed that the amount of Black students has significantly decreased, falling from a 13 percent average to 5 percent in the 2024 admissions cycle. Amherst College also announced an 8 percent decrease in enrollment of Black students.

However, this does not mean that fewer students of color applied. According to a new study from the Common Application, students of color were not dissuaded from applying following the landmark ruling. Over the past five years, applications of Latinx and Black students have remained in line with projected demographic trends, with more applications being submitted over time. With data only beginning to trickle in across the country, it's difficult to pinpoint an exact trend. Regardless, Oberlin's administration has been historically outspoken about its stance on affirmative action.



First-Years and their families gather in Finney Chapel.

Photo courtesy of Mike Crupi



First-years enjoy various orientation events.

Photo courtesy of Scott Shaw

In 2003, the U.S. Supreme Court officially permitted Oberlin and other institutions to consider race in the admissions process. Then-President Nancy Dye affirmed to the public that Oberlin had always taken a holistic approach toward applications and celebrated the "major constitutional victory." The College had been a part of advocacy for the implementation of affirmative action, joining 27 peer institutions such as Amherst, Bryn Mawr College, and Pomona College in a brief to the Supreme Court. Oberlin stated that it has been "steadily

attentive to the importance of enrolling Black Americans since well before the Civil War."

President Ambar evoked historical memory in a letter to Oberlin's campus nearly twenty years later. She discussed the significance of Mary Jane Patterson, an Oberlin alum and the first Black woman in the U.S. to earn a bachelor's degree.

"The education of Mary Jane Patterson — and the leadership role for which it prepared her — was no accident of history but a conscious choice," she wrote. "Oberlin was the first college in

the United States to officially embrace the admission of Black students and the first coed school to grant bachelor's degrees to women."

Ambar noted that the end of affirmative action left her saddened and concerned, but she hoped to defend Oberlin's core values of diversity and social engagement.

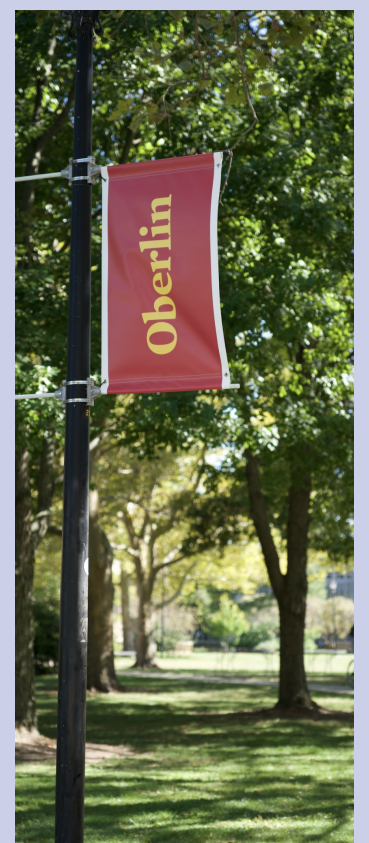
The following month, Ohio Senator JD Vance wrote a letter to Oberlin College and several other universities expressing concern about their behavior. He labeled it as "defiant" and "potentially unlawful." Vance indicated that the U.S. Senate would use its power to uncover circumvention of the legal precedent. He advised Oberlin to retain admissions documents due to the possibility of congressional investigations.

In a statement to *The Oberlin Review*, director of Media Relations Andrea Simakis provided an update.

"The Supreme Court decision regarding affirmative action has made it more challenging for Oberlin to achieve our long-standing mission of equity and inclusion in higher education," she wrote. "We are committed to serving this mission while fully complying with the law.

The Multicultural Resource Commons remains dedicated to supporting students of color. BI-POC Fellow Madison Shipp directs programming, leads intergroup dialogue and facilitation, and holds office hours.

"It's crucial to recognize the



A flag located in Wilder Bowl.

Photo by Erin Koo, Photo Editor



The class of 2028.

Photo courtesy of Scott Shaw

systemic inequities that are rooted in higher ed institutions and how students of color are constantly being impacted," Shipp said. "We have programs that are catered toward students of color and are intentional in the ways we create space for our students through heritage months, joyful events, and supportive resources."