College Admissions — *synthesis*

Affirmative Dissatisfaction - *The Economist*, June 23 2018	**I went to Oxford** (by Afua Hirsch) - *The Guardian*, August 15 2017	**American Protest** (by Meredith Varner) - *The Daily Free Press*, March 18 2019	
Issue : Harvard's biased college admissions which runs counter to meritocracy In Harvard, race-based quotas have been applied since 1920s with Jews : today, Asian-Americans are the most discriminated against ethnic group ▶ controversial issue as unethical, that's why Harvard (and many other US top universities) have modified their admission process : not based on sheer academic performance anymore but 'holistic' admissions policy = including other non-academic criteria : relevance and performance of extracurricular activities + family wealth / social background race / ethnic origin Reactions : SFFA claims such practice is unfair and biased ▶ filed a lawsuit against Harvard (2014) which tarnished its reputation Yet statistics speak for themselves : a) by Harvard admissions office : despite outperforming white students in both academic and extracurricular activities, Asian-Americans still suffer from low admission quotas Cause : they allegedly fail the 'personality' metric because it is carried out subjectively = evidence of race-based discrimination for SFFA b) P. Arcidiacono (economist) defending Asian-Americans proves how low they rank compared with other ethnies c) # Harvard's economist claims Asian-Americans are advantaged as much as white students (in terms of race exclusively) BUT Harvard need to prove they are right to get federal funding ! ▶ economists' armwrestling = fairness is at stake and both fail to define it properly according to another economist Another factor : the legacy preferences = favouring wealthy white students because of their family relationship with former students + white athletes ➢Although unfairness and racial bias may be proved statistically, Harvard manages to get away with it by including more personal criteria (difficult to assess or condemn) ➢However, other US top universities manage to be more inclusive and fair	Issue : UK's top universities discriminate against minority students + A. Hirsch experienced it (Oxford, Britain) = unfair Pb: people's assumption and ingrained beliefs based on stereotypes : black students > Oxford Brookes (or other post-1990s universities), not Oxford College = elite universities with mainly white students and do not mirror the diversity of the population (according to a 2017 University of Bath study) UK universities = a symptom and cause of segregation a) symptom : minority groups set apart as early as primary school + enrolment encouraged in keeping with ethnic majority (according to 2015-2016 governmental surveys) ▶ no population mixes b) cause of segregation : because of a deep-rooted reputation of being undiverse, minority students do not choose top universities willingly : feel self-conscious/uncomfortable, too conspicuous in an unfamiliar environment + not only a racial problem but a social one (social hierarchy) Consequence : growing anxiety among minority students as : - not supported by their university (which fails to represent themselves) - lose self-confidence and depreciate themselves : example of A. Hirsch tutoring 2 minority students ▶ students drop out Pb with UK top universities: 'tolerance' - accept minority groups for their reputation - failure to encourage such students and to anticipate their specific needs (according to OFFA) ▶ more failure than success ➢ for A. Hirsch, education is a telling example of Britain's failure to consider population diversity in its society as a whole	Issue : college admissions scandal = famous and wealthy parents cheating test scores (SATs) and sport performances to get into US top universities ▶ what about academic merit or skills ? = criticized by M. Varner US higher education system cannot work without funds, so applicants/students whose families are significant donors are preferred Recent leaked files (2018) during a lawsuit against Harvard have evidenced this problem of unfairness ▶ College admissions = a flawed system that markedly benefits the top 1% of rich students because their parents resort to expensive private tuitions to help them perform better at SATs, not by providing relevant knowledge but by giving tips about the way to take the exams (proved by M. Varner's personal experience) = a way of cheating and buying one's admission +common practice, so everyone turns a blind eye to it Reasons : a) Affirmative action (establishing racial quotas for more fairness) is criticised as not so fair b) Community colleges = not praised, inferior, not opening doors ▶extreme pressure ➢ for M. Varner, a change in mentalities (and deep-rooted beliefs or habits) is much needed to ensure fairness, hence equality of opportunities for all	**Cartoon** (by Dave Granlund) - March 2019 Parents bribe the head/ dean of a college so that their child may be selected > Pinocchio's nose = cheating ▶ social/wealth discrimination = unfairness **Classroom Diversity on the Rise** - December 2018, by US census.gov True that the number of Asian-Americans in College has increased over the past decade = more diversity a sa whole Yet, they are still discriminated against compared with other ethnic groups +whites : still very privileged ▶ race-based discrimination = unfairness

College admissions : dissatisfaction

Plan :

1 - Race-based discrimination > unfairness, no diversity
2 - Social and financial discrimination > to maintain fame (results, legacy) and funds (donations and bribes)
3 - Evading the ethical issue : Affirmative Action reversed, pressure for everyone, both universities and students / Ethical issue (legal and emotional aspects)
➢ Debunking the myth of top universities = solution

Pb : How and why do college admissions … consider wealth and race over merit ? / A debate over fairness and equality of opportunities at stake /
What are the causes and consequences of flawed college admissions in the US and Britain for both students and society as a whole ?

Elements to be considered / explained in the synthesis :
- origin of statistics (SFFA, OFFA, economists, Harvard)
- 2 opinion pieces : one = a personal British experience / the other = levels criticism at a rigged system
- deep-rooted ideas/stereotypical ideas about top colleges > wealth and social backgrounds = taken for granted
- the terms 'legacy' (family relationship), SATs (to get into college), community colleges or polytechnic schools : less prestigious