

# Harvard lawsuit reveals emphasis on academic clubs

College's admissions value commitment to academics outside of class

by Alyssa Pak

In light of the racial discrimination case against Harvard University, the school has been required to release documents detailing their admissions process.

Part of the Reading Procedures, which Harvard uses to evaluate applicants, ranks students on a numbered scale in categories ranging from "Academic" to "Extracurricular, Community Employment, Family Commitments," with 1 representing the most qualified.

According to PrepScholar, a college admissions and test prep guide, only about 12 applicants in a pool of about 30,000 can expect to score all 1s on their application.

For the 2015-2018 classes, most of the 5,525 students attained an overall score of 2+/2/2-; in comparison, all 94 students who got a 1 were admitted into the college, and legal documents confirm that those who receive a 1 overall are always accepted.

Athletics have consistently been seen as an important aspect of the admissions process, and by freshman year, many students have chosen a sport to demonstrate commitment on their application.

Senior Marilyn Gao decided on rowing as her sport of choice due to the multitude of recruitment opportunities and athletic scholarships.

"Rowing has taught me a lot about my physical and mental limitations and also a lot about teamwork and how to work hard. It's also great because it's your extra 'edge' to get you into a school," stated Gao.

But in Harvard's extracurricular



Harvard report emphasizes the value of participating in academic clubs like Science Olympiad | Caldwell

category on the Reading Procedures, the rating for a 1 stands for "unusual strength in one or more areas. Possible national-level achievement or professional experience. A potential major contributor at Harvard. Truly unusual achievement."

Since there's an entirely separate section for athletics, this section displays the school's inclination towards more academic activities such as debate or Model UN.

"You have to show these schools that you're academically questioning. They want inquisitive, thinking students who are asking questions, and I think that's what they're getting many times from students who do activities such as Science Olympiad, when it isn't just rote memorization for an exam," said PHSC Department Chair James Conroy.

Science Olympiad certainly sets

itself apart from other competitive extracurriculars due to its heavily academic nature, competing locally and nationally, although it places the same emphasis on collaboration as any other team would; each person's success depends on their event partners and other teammates.

"We strive to fulfill the responsibilities we have to one another because we care about the collective's success, and I find that to be special in a competition whose premise, on the surface, is simply to win the most medals," said senior Edward Seol, a cohead of the Science Olympiad team.

Seol has found that being a cohead has given him the chance to hone his leadership skills in crafting a vision for the team and handling adversity, drama, and immense pressure."

Senior Emily Dale, who participates in math team, thinks that other non-academic extracurriculars can be just as important and agrees with the partiality towards clubs.

"Academic clubs are a way to show if you're extremely smart, and that's one of the things Harvard wants. Plenty of people have straight As in math or science, but only a few can win at a competition," said Dale.

Yet no matter the extracurricular, all schools, not just Harvard, want students who are well-rounded.

"With so many highly achieving students, colleges should be valuing recommendations and personal qualities that truly distinguish one student from another in a way that is not visible on a transcript or a list of activities," said Seol.

In Harvard's Reading Procedures, a 1 in personal qualities

was "outstanding," a 2 "very strong" and 3 "generally positive." It's difficult to say what distinguishes a "generally positive" from an "outstanding."

"As you go down in selectivity, you have to make more hairline decisions. It gets to be so subjective. Everyone reads the essays differently," said Conroy. "It's not a science, it's definitely a stab in the dark. You don't just have a formula because you're dealing with human beings who are different."

Seol shared a similar opinion, explaining that he sees the logic behind the subjectivity as valid.

"I do realize that Harvard sees thousands upon thousands of applicants who do these same activities, so I can understand why exceptional athletic or personal qualities become significantly more important than these academic teams."

But often times, academic clubs can be the perfect outlet for students to connect their personal interests to the topics that they're interested in pursuing in the future.

"Being able to tell your life story and interests is important, but in the end it needs to connect to your original purpose of actually applying to college to study something," said senior Edward Lee, who has been a member of math team since sixth grade.

Like other students, he originally joined because his mom pushed him to, but said that "It was because of legitimate interest that I developed that compelled me to continue with math team into high school."

The focus on school-related extracurriculars makes sense, as students who are interested in academics in high school are most likely self-motivated to succeed in their classes at college.

At the same time, senior Allison Elli believes that "in admissions, it's very important to focus on not the test scores, but the essays and what the student does in their free time."

## Illinois maintains legal age of 21 to buy tobacco

Proposed Tobacco 21 legislation could lower smoking rates

by Layla Saqibuddin

On Nov. 28th, lawmakers failed to override Governor Bruce Rauner's veto of legislation that would raise the statewide minimum age to buy tobacco products to 21.

People in Illinois who are 18-years old are able to purchase cigarettes in many areas of the state. While the current state law calls for a minimum age of 18 for purchasing tobacco, many towns have increased it to 21.

According to the Chicago Tribune, so called "Tobacco 21" laws have already been approved in many towns in Illinois including, "Chicago, Evanston, Oak Park, Naperville, Highland Park, Deerfield, Maywood, Lincolnshire, Vernon Hills, Berwyn, Buffalo Grove, Elk Grove, Mundelein and more recently Wilmette."

During a Nov. 12 press conference, Chicago Department of Public Health Commissioner Dr. Julie Morita believes Chicago has become a national leader in the fight against tobacco and nicotine.

"We banned the sale of flavored tobacco, including menthol near high schools. We banned chewing tobacco from our ballparks and our stadiums.



Legislation to change the tobacco minimum age remains intact | AP Images

We raised the age of tobacco purchase to 21."

Under the tobacco legislation, it would have been illegal to sell tobacco products, including e-cigarettes to anyone under 21. Retailers who broke the law could have been fined, but now the state as a whole will not penalize those caught possessing tobacco while underage.

While this means more health concerns, many believe that 18 year olds are responsible and mature enough to make their own decisions.

Senior Alex Gjaja said, "We are medically emancipated from our parents and we are able to vote. How is it that at 18 one can help choose the future of the country and can go fight and even potentially die for the country, yet not have a decision about some controlled substances."

According to the Chicago

Tribune, Republican state Representative Allen Skillicorn of East Dundee said, "18-year-olds can get credit cards, buy cars and join the military. They should get to make choices, even if smoking is a 'dirty, disgusting habit.'"

However, Democratic state Sen. Julie Morrison of Deerfield believes the "Tobacco 21" policies will help decrease the vaping and smoking rates. Morrison believes smoking is not something people should take advantage of.

"Smoking is not a right. Smoking is an addiction and a societal burden," said Morrison.

In fact, according to the Institute of Medicine the benefits of Tobacco 21 reduces teen access to tobacco products and makes it less likely for teens to purchase tobacco.

"Tobacco 21 policies could

reduce overall smoking by "12% by the time today's teenagers become adults. The biggest declines in tobacco use would be seen among 15-17 year olds (25%) and 18-20 year olds (15%)."

However, while many are hoping for the minimum age to be raised to 21, some students are not sure if it will lower smoking rates.

"Teenagers will still be able to find the products, just as teen drinking still exists. Raising the drinking age to 21 had negative effects on college drinking culture, leading to more binge drinking. I wonder if raising the age to 21 for smoking products will have a similar effect," said Gjaja.

Similarly, senior Maggie Graves agreed, "18 year olds are old enough to understand the consequences. Even if they choose to ignore it, they will eventually realize the cost of doing something so harmful."

Senior Neil Dhote believes that many are at the age where one could make responsible decisions and know the consequences.

"Having a higher minimum age could make people less likely to want to smoke or vape. People who always follow the rules might not want to use them until they get to the right age, which will have a positive impact in high schools and different towns," said Dhote.

## An update from Student Alliance



- Food Items: New Caesar Salad Selection, New Bean Team Condiment (honey), and RX bars

- Bean Team travel cup/mug, coming soon to NT's bookstore, can be used for 40 cent discount in coffee if you bring it to the coffee bar.

- New suggestion boxes in Scrounge, near gym entrance, and 2nd floor rotunda

- New leadership opportunity for the sophomores called Alliance Constituent Board (ACB), allows students to get involved in advisory leadership