

278. Race-Based Restrictions from an Academic Perspective

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One thing to note about the Queen's University Accelerated Route to Medical School (QuARMS) program is that it embodies disdain for undergraduate liberal education. Students who succeed in the QuARMS program can be accepted into the four-year MD program at the Queen's School of Medicine without having to complete a bachelor's degree; students may apply for acceptance after only two years. QuARMS draws on undergraduate courses to create a pre-med stream, thereby removing those courses from their home within comprehensive liberal education.

Queen's has recently decided to allow only Black and Indigenous students access to the QuARMS program. Another thing to note, then, is that Queen's administrators have lost their horror and repugnance at the idea that people be welcomed or not on the basis of their race or ethnicity.

Could race-based restrictions be effective in bringing about justice and fairness in society generally—perhaps, though, only after two or three generations? Many of us have our doubts. Making race, sex, ethnicity, or whatever salient in decisions regarding the allocation of resources tends to perpetuate their salience.

While some advocates of race-based restrictions hope restrictions are but a ladder to be kicked away once we're all on the same high level, others favour them out of a desire to create separate spaces for different races and ethnicities. Difference feminism provides us with a model of this.

Difference feminism contends that males and females or women and men tend to like and value different things, that they work to different rhythms, and that what oppresses women in an environment might enliven men and vice versa. Women and men, then, will each flourish only if they have ample time among their own kind and away from the other. Women and men, difference feminists say, can certainly both be doctors, but women will be excellent as doctors in ways different from men. To enable them to be excellent, women need to be able to doctor as women. For that reason, even though most medical training will be common and had in mixed company, women and men should at times be schooled differently, perhaps separately.

The model given by difference feminism need have no answer to the question *why* females and males differ as they do (or at least differ as the theorists think they do). Thus, the model can be applied to races or ethnicities without presupposing that the differences are anything other than encultured. Restrictions based on race or ethnicity, then, supporters maintain, are helpful not in eliminating barriers between the individual and that individual's rightful aspirations, as some hope, but rather in enabling minority cultures to flourish. That, in any case, is an alternative rationale for distributing resources, such as quick routes to medical school, on grounds of race or ethnicity.

Both ways of thinking are contrary to academic values and goals. Whether one favours ethnicity-based restrictions on entry into an academic program either as a means to redress group inequalities or as a means to support minority cultures, one is still seeing prospective students as members or representatives of groups and not as individual aspiring scholars. As academics, our culture is that of disputatious inquirers into the phenomena of the world. We would have students join us only as such.

The dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at Queen's University, Jane Philpott, replied to the letter sent to her by the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship by stating that "QuARMS provides a unique opportunity to address our commitment to Black and Indigenous communities." I stated above that admission restrictions might well be an ineffective, if not counterproductive, way to help black and indigenous students whose resources are limited. When we look at the matter from the perspective of the academic mission, though, we must question whether a university should prefer its commitment to alleviating the plight of certain communities to the academic values that should sustain it.

We might, of course, wonder whether a university should in the first place have any commitment to alleviating the plight of certain communities. Or we might propose that the best way for a university to help, whatever the problem, is for it to be as good an academic institution as it can be.