Must differentiate types of equality

To the Editor:

Discrimination appears to be one of the new "hot topics." The debate started with a letter about the disbanding of the Office of Minority Education, but has recently been expanded to discrimination in general in James Abernathy's letter to The Tech (October 5).

I would like to relate an experience I had earlier this year. I used to live in a rural area, and the opportunities for technical jobs were very limited. Last summer, one of the local colleges sponsored a summer jobs program, open to two students on a competitive basis. The particulars of the program are not important; it was the only chance I had to find a summer job that had some relation to what I would be studying this year.

My application, however, was not even considered. I was turned down because I am of the wrong race, the wrong sex, and the wrong economic bracket. Obviously, I was discriminated against.

Before going on, I should mention that I am a white male from an upper middle-class family. Ahh! It's no longer a case of discrimination, only an affirmative action program. Or is it?

This is not a complaint about "reverse discrimination," I do not believe that this is the case. Nor do I advocate "color blindness." I know discrimination exists, and this fact must be recognized before something can be done about it.

My purpose in writing this letter is to point out the difference between equality of opportunity and equality of result, a distinction which has been blurred in recent letters to The Tech. Equality of opportunity simply means that everyone has a fair and equal chance. Equality of result is a more extreme doctrine. Not only must a program be non-discriminatory, but it must also insure that some minority group is represented to a certain extent. In other words, somebody must be turned down so this requirement can be met, even if that person is the most qualified, deserving, etc.

This is hardly the American ideal of equal representation for all. Any solution for discrimination, then, must consider the rights of everyone involved, not just of those being discriminated against. We all have our rights. Equality of opportunity does not deny that minorities have special needs and problems. If anything, it affirms this fact. Programs set up under this doctrine are most beneficial to all involved; programs set up under the doctrine of equality of result help some and harm others.

Hopefully, the debate will not end here. Discrimination still exists. There are many solutions, and they should all be heard. They probably won't be liked by everyone. But at least now there is a way of evaluating these solutions which focuses on political and social realities, rather than pure emotion.

Barry J. Berenberg '88

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