

How does affirmative action without quota work? Evidence from a large Brazilian university.*

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First Draft
August 2015

Abstract

This paper examines an affirmative action policy in college admission exams that awarded bonus points to applicants coming from public schools and visible minorities. Using administrative data from UNICAMP, a large, highly ranked Brazilian university, we assess the policy's effect on the composition of admitted students, accounting for possible behavioral responses at the extensive (participation) and intensive (preparation effort) margin. The policy was associated to sizable redistribution, shifting the composition towards unfavored backgrounds. There is surprisingly little evidence for behavioral adjustments, although exam participation but not performance of the favored increased and exam performance of private school alumni from minorities decreased.

Keywords: post-secondary education, affirmative action.

*This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council in Canada. We would like to thank Gustavo Katague, Derek Rice, Duangsuda Sopchokchai, Bogdan Urban, and Pedro Feitosa for their excellent research assistance. All remaining errors are ours.

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