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Lisa: Hi, I'm Lisa Hernandez.

Lizzy: And I'm Lizzy Ghedi-Ehrlich.

Lisa: And we are your hosts for Scholar Strategy Network's No Jargon. Every other week, we will discuss an American policy problem with one of the nation's top researchers without jargon.

Lizzy: Well, it's April, so you know what season that is.

Lisa: My TikTok feed is full of college admissions. That's that season.

Lizzy: Chock-a-block with those, those letters you get the big packet or the small envelope. I guess if you get the small envelope, a rejection, no jargon here, you wouldn't necessarily post it on TikTok. But yeah, what are you seeing, Lisa?

Lisa: Well, you know what is that I'm seeing? People looking at websites. So no packages, unfortunately.

Lizzy: Oh, we don't even have paper anymore. What do you think of that? Look at me being old.

Lisa: But I am seeing people huddled with their families, really trying to parse out whether or not all the hard work that they put into the college admissions of it all has paid off for them. People are wearing their Yale sweatshirts, and if they get rejected, they quickly take it off and then put another sweatshirt on. So I'm seeing a lot of sweatshirts, and it is really interesting for me. I never went through that kind of college admission process, so I'm definitely sort of living vicariously through other people, but I think the more I talked to the researcher, the scholar that we are going to be hearing from soon, the more even prouder I feel of these people who did go through a lot of hurdles and, you know, eventually, at least on my feed, landed into colleges that I know that they work through a lot of the technical difficulties, a lot of the legal things that have been making changes for them in order to make it to their dream school. And a lot of people aren't making it in.

Lizzy: Right, which I guess we'd probably see less of. Yeah, I mean, for me, I think one of the things that we always try to do here at Scholar Strategy Network is talk about what the effects of a policy change have meant for people because these timelines are long. Like the Supreme Court issues a ruling, your state legislature passes a law, it's not going to have an immediate effect on you. Things take time to actually percolate and have their consequences reveal themselves.

And I feel like, especially with everything else going on, we've moved away from some of the conversations around affirmative action policies, like what they were, what they meant for schools. And when those rulings came down, largely taking affirmative action tools away from,

from college and university processes, it was kind of then a question mark, like, what's gonna happen? We know what we think this is gonna mean, we know what the research says, we know what history has said, but the future's still in front of us. And, you know, as some of those families and their, uh, secret stash of 2 to 4 sweatshirts might say, the future is now. So we're finding out.

Lisa: Yeah, absolutely, we are finding out. And, you know, talking to an amazing professor that we'll be hearing from soon, we learn about what things to look out for in the future as well. So for this episode, I spoke with Julie Park, a professor of education at the University of Maryland and the author of *Race, Class, and Affirmative Action: College Admissions in a New Era*, published earlier this year. Her research focuses on race and diversity in higher education with a special focus on college admissions. Here's our conversation.

Professor Park, welcome to Jargon.

Julie: Thanks for having me.

Lisa: Of course. So we are actually recording this at the beginning of April as many students across the country are opening their college decision letters, hopefully admissions. These decisions are always very emotional for a lot of these students and their families, and it can also be very confusing for them, especially given how much rules around admissions seem to be shifting. So to start this conversation, can you catch us up on the most important changes to college admissions that have played out over the last couple of years?

Julie: Yeah, there are a bunch of things that have happened in a relatively short time, and so it makes sense that students and families are feeling kind of just a lot. I have a nephew who's a junior, so he's like just beginning to get through the process, and his— my sister, his mom, is like overwhelmed because they're overwhelmed with just all the little fine-grained details. So, you know, some of the most significant changes, I mean, the one that I study is of course in 2023, the Supreme Court ruled to restrict race-conscious admissions. And so with that, the public oftentimes has had a lot of ideas about what was race-conscious admissions. And some people even thought it was things like quotas or, you know, just admitting people because of their race. And it certainly was not that. What it referred to was just looking at the entire students' application holistically, their context for opportunity, and just being able to recognize or even see, you know, their race, ethnicity, and consider, right, consider, not determine, but consider if it had any link, right, with their context for opportunity or their potential, what they might bring to a campus, and even in turn society, right, in terms of contributions to the workforce or, you know, society in areas where a group might be underrepresented. So that court case was significant, it's important to recognize that institutions still can recognize the role of race in students' life if a student chooses to discuss it. Some people think that the ruling means one thing, but in my book, I try to make it clear that, you know, students should still feel free to talk about race, ethnicity, and institutions still do have some flexibility to consider that contrary to what many believe. So that was one big thing. And then another big thing has just been shifts around the testing landscape. So during the pandemic, we had the widespread adoption of test optional for the first time. Like, you know,

some schools had gone test optional before the pandemic, and probably the most prominent selective one was University of Chicago. Before the pandemic, like, I don't think people thought like the Ivies would ever go test optional, but they did, right, in 2020, 2021. And for a while, you know, things were humming along, people seemed pretty happy with test optional, but in around 2024, Some of the Ivies started going back and now I believe they are all back except for Columbia.

And then you have, uh, some other elite schools like Stanford and Caltech that also went back to require testing. So the admissions landscape is kind of like a checkerboard in that respect. The vast majority of schools still are test optional, but, uh, you just certainly have more variation and you even have test-free in the University of California system, which is a giant player. And so those are two of the biggest ones, but there are also things like related to like the Trump administration's crackdown on international students. Certainly changes in financial aid, uh, FAFSA changed quite a bit like a year or two back. Yeah, there have been so many changes just within a relatively short period of time.

Lisa: So the book that you mentioned is called *Race, Class, and Affirmative Action: College Admissions in a New Era*. Can you walk us through what led you to write this book, which, as you mentioned, it did sort of zero in on that 2023 Supreme Court ruling on race-conscious admission policies. But was there a particular reasoning behind you writing a book about this particular case?

Julie: Yeah, there are a couple things. I mean, one was just the ruling itself and just seeing how much confusion there was about the rule, what the ruling actually said. My research team, we have a group called the College Admissions Futures Collaborative, and we were doing a series of studies that were supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation around that time, around test optional, around inequality in the college application evaluation beyond tests as well. So looking at things like letters of recommendation and extracurriculars. So we had a ton of research that was coming out that I thought was relevant to the conversation, the kind of the post-Supreme Court landscape. And on top of that, there was all of this other research that I thought was really important that I didn't see necessarily like getting as much visibility as I would've liked.

So Professor Mike Bastedo at University of Michigan, you know, his team has done so much great research around lower-income students and holistic admissions measures, like what happens when you have people look at what he calls contextualized GPA. So looking at the GPA in context, like to the median GPA at the high school, and how does that stack up as a predictor of college outcomes, things like that. So there's a bunch of really great research that was like in a million places, and I thought it would be helpful to try to bring it in one place. Another thing is when you publish a study, yes, you're building on, well, first of all, a lot of studies just never get read by anyone besides researchers, right? So that was another thing. And I knew that I liked writing in a conversational tone. I thought I could make this work more accessible. I had already started writing the book, but then in early 2024, we saw this rollout of research from Opportunity Insights and researchers at Dartmouth College arguing to go back to required tests. Tests. And, you know, while I thought the actual research, like the analyses were

really interesting, I disagreed with some of the conclusions. Like I didn't think they necessarily pointed in a clear-cut direction that institutions needed to go back to tests.

And so, you know, I kind of wanted to be in conversation with those studies and unpack them. And so that was, you know, another thing that I thought you could do in a book that you can't really do as well in the peer review process, or it's just not the same.

And then the last thing, the book kind of took on new meaning in 2025 when we saw all this anti-DEI, et cetera, stuff rolling out from the Trump administration and really the weaponization of the ruling in SFFA, right? So SFFA is a ruling about admissions, but suddenly the Trump administration was saying it applied to everything. They said that means that the whole campus needs to be like, quote, colorblind in some way. And I was like, whoa, whoa, whoa. The ruling does not say anything about graduation celebrations for students of color.

And so I wanted to— it was tricky because the book was mostly done by then, but I still had time to put in commentary and address some of those issues, both to challenge how the Trump administration was framing the ruling, but also to say like, this book exists as sort of as a documentation of how really institutions should be responding to the ruling. That doesn't mean institutions are doing these things, 'cause now they're scared, but I wanted there to be a record to say like, hey, this is actually what we could be doing because this is what the ruling actually says. And so that sort of took on a new meaning during the last wave as I was pulling the book together.

Lisa: You mentioned how many changes come about and how quickly they come about. Was it difficult to put sort of a stop point, like, okay, I can no longer say— and now this is different, um, within your book.

Julie: Yeah, I had to— I think like the final copy edits were in August, I want to say, and I had talked a decent amount about this program that College Board had called Landscape, and that was actually based off the research of Mike Bastedo, where it was like a dashboard where admissions officers could see data about like the student's high school like percentage of students who took APs, like percent of free reduced lunch, like really easily to sort of contextualize decisions. The Trump administration rolled out more non-binding but scary guidance to institutions in, I think, late July. So this is the Department of Justice, right? And after that, College Board decided to pull Landscape, even though it was a totally race-neutral tool, right? It's not racist. Ethnicity-focused. And even the study said using landscape was not linked to greater racial ethnic diversity. It was, if it was supposed to be a proxy for race, it wasn't even an effective one, I argued.

But anyway, they pulled that. And so I was like, oh, great. Because I talked about in my book, I had landscape in the present tense. So fortunately, we were able to adjust it in most of the places, but I think I lost, I missed one. So if someone reads the book very carefully, there might be one place where I talk about landscape, like it's still live, but we were able to sneak in like as of August 2025, like College Board pulled back this program. So that was sort of the hard stop. But, you know, we still have had more stuff come out from the administration. But I think the basic principles that I talk about in the book of you really need to question what they're saying, the ruling doesn't mean that, still apply to all the stuff that has rolled out since.

Lisa: And as far as these basic principles, I guess I'm thinking of the terms that you were using here. So you mentioned race neutral, diversity, We're using affirmative action in college admissions. A lot of people have different definitions for that. They often picture very different things. So from your perspective, what does diversity and affirmative action mean and why do they matter in higher education?

Julie: Yeah, absolutely. And people have different readings and even the very ruling, because, you know, you may have remembered headlines like affirmative action is dead or race-conscious admissions is dead. And in the book, I really argue that it is restricted, right? It is, it is, you know, it's certainly like hobbling, right? But the ruling did not kill, right, these, like, the ability to have some consideration or sensitivity towards race in the admissions process. So in terms of how I define diversity, I mean, first it's, you know, thinking about what cut type you're talking about. There's sometimes I write specifically about racial ethnic diversity or class economic diversity. And it's actually very important to distinguish between the two because policies that facilitate economic diversity don't always result in greater racial ethnic diversity. And so I try to distinguish between the two. But in terms of like diversity, I use that term to refer to like just general heterogeneity within a student body, in this context as related to race, ethnicity, or economic class.

And of course, you have other types of diversity, religious diversity, etc. And then even within racial ethnic diversity, you have to sometimes parse down even more because you might have campuses that have certain types of diversity, like the University of California systems have like a lot of white and Asian students. And, you know, that's a type of diversity, but they're also missing a lot of Black students. So, right, they can have certain types of diversity, but lack other types of diversity.

And then what was the second term you asked? Was it affirmative action? Yeah, that's another one that gets really thorny because the two terms are used interchangeably, race conscious, often. And even I do it, like, even on the title of this book, right? Like, I would have loved to say something like The Future of Race-Conscious Admissions or something like that. But, you know, the publisher knew, like, they said, like, affirmative action is the catchphrase, right? It's what people are going to type for, search for. It's alliteration, it rolls off the tongue.

And so in the book I have these apologies, like actually we're going to talk about a very specific type of policy that can include affirmative action, but is not necessarily in and of itself a form of affirmative action. And there's a lawyer named Art Coleman who's really good at talking about this. And so you could see affirmative action as this broader group of programs and initiatives that rolled out after the 1960s that are trying to act affirmatively, act proactively to diversify whatever context, the workforce, educational schools, et cetera.

And, you know, during certain time periods, they took forms that, you know, are not very common really at all today. So for instance, you know, in the 1960s, they did have in some cases, like what are called like set-asides or actual like numbers, right, related to other groups. But you had later Supreme Court decisions that struck down those approaches in the educational context, at least.

So race-conscious admissions is sort of like a nephew, child of affirmative action, where it is the most— like, it's sort of the term that describes how affirmative action was applied within the actual, like, admissions context, right? And but what it refers to is really just consideration, like

just looking at race, ethnicity, but not necessarily acting affirmatively. So just knowing someone is Black doesn't mean you're gonna say, okay, like, I'm gonna think of you favorably. It's just knowing, acknowledging that they are Black, right? And that that's a reality. And what an admissions person does with that information, that could vary quite substantially. So it's, you could think of a Venn diagram where there is substantive overlap, but there are also some distinctions.

Lisa: And you've defined race conscious here. Could you also define what then is race neutral?

Julie: That's another tricky one because it's a term we use. Okay. So it is really tricky because race neutral often is not really race neutral in reality, but it's a term we use for policies that do not directly consider race, ethnicity. And so that generally includes like policies that more directly recognize social class, for instance, or SES in some form. It could refer to a policy that is just not really looking at race, ethnicity.

That said, so for instance, percent plans, right, that have been used in like states like Texas. So Texas had, there was a court case where they could not use race-conscious admissions anymore in Texas. So what they came up with is if you're in the top 10% of your graduating high school class, you can go to the Texas public school of your choice. And so that was called a race-neutral plan because on the face value, at least, like there was no criteria related to race. It was just strictly like, are you in your top 10% of your class? Now it's like the top 5% because it's so competitive. Really the only reason why they instated the plan and part of why it does produce some racial ethnic diversity is because Texas schools, high schools, just like the rest of the country, are so segregated by race, right?

So it's kind of a workaround to support racial ethnic diversity, but the actual selection criteria, at least on face value, are race neutral, even though the reality, there may be implications related to race ethnicity when the policy is implemented.

Lisa: Okay. And you, just for our listeners here, you mentioned it SES, which would stand for socioeconomic status. So thank you for providing all of those definitions and almost like foundational knowledge.

For the listeners who are engaged, a lot of us are engaging in these conversations about diversity, about DEI, and a lot of folks have really no idea how this is playing out as far as college admissions goes. Your book spends a lot of time unpacking this Supreme Court decision, what happened afterwards? You've described that aftermath as having kind of a cascade effect. So what do you mean by that? And what are some of the consequences outside of higher education that we might not be seeing right now?

Julie: Sure. So that's a term that was coined really in the aftermath of Proposition 209, which banned the consideration of race in admissions in California almost 30 years ago. And so what they saw there, and what we also see now, is that there are two primary waves of this cascade effect. So you can kind of think of a waterfall that's like goes down once and then it goes down again. And so the first wave is when you have some Black, Brown, Indigenous students who, Native American students who potentially would have gotten in earlier to an elite institution, but

because of either bans or restrictions on race-conscious admissions, they are either turned away, like they are not admitted. Or they may choose not to apply.

Those students are not attending the sort of most elite sector, whether Ivies, top 20, etc., top 50. And so they cascade, right? So they will end up at a less selective institution. And it still could be a selective institution. It could still be like a selective state flagship, or it could just be a state flagship in general is where students tend to land. And so that's sort of, you can think of that as wave 1.

We're actually really concerned about wave 1 because there is research, you know, that shows that there are unique payoffs for, in particular, Black and Brown, Native American, et cetera, students when they attend more selective institutions. In fact, there are unique payoffs. There's a famous study by these researchers called Dale and Krueger, where they found that going to a more selective institution didn't really have payoffs for the general population in terms of salary. Like once you control for stuff, hold stuff constant, there really isn't a payoff unless you are Black or Latinx or first, like first-generation college student, then there is a unique and they say substantial payoff. And you can think of that as, oh, people have to be like twice as good, right? To hang, right? And then of course, elite institutions for better or for worse, they are a gateway to special opportunities. Networks, right? Leader who's founding a startup at Stanford or who's dropping out of Harvard together, right? To form a company. So we are concerned about wave one, certainly.

So wave two happens when students who ordinarily would've attended, say, the public state flagship or similar type of institution, they are also turned away. So they could be turned away because they are not able to get in, right? Well, you know, in the absence of race-conscious admissions, they, it could be because they choose to not apply, et cetera. And so in turn, they end up at either an even less selective institution or say an open access type institution. So that could be a community college, a regional college, or even a for-profit institution.

Now the first two regionals and community college, I don't want to diminish the work they do. They do amazing work in supporting students, they are really like the bread and butter of democracy, right? That said, they tend to have fewer resources, right? They are underfunded. And we know that unfortunately, students of color in particular have very low community college transfer rates. You know, there's a study by Zach Bleemer at Princeton who, you know, compared students who were able to attend the more selective institution versus the less selective institution. And he did see gains linked to attending, you know, the more selective institution, even in the public university context.

So, and then the other worry is that they may cascade down institutions that really don't have their best interests at heart. So the for-profit sector and David Mickey-Pabello did this great study showing that he calls it actually an avalanche effect, not just a cascade effect, but an avalanche effect wherein that wave in states that banned affirmative action or race-conscious admissions even before the Supreme Court case, that you had a notable increase in Black and Latinx students landing at for-profit institutions, which are known for sometimes predatory practices. You know, you get a bunch of debt, but you don't even graduate, et cetera. So that's the secondary wave of the cascade or avalanche effect.

What happens to students when they can't attend that public state flagship? And it's tricky to see how the second wave is hitting. The first wave is very obvious, right? You see these dramatic drops. Drops, for instance, in Black enrollment at places like Johns Hopkins, Amherst,

Vanderbilt, Columbia. But you don't see these huge shifts in some of the public universities because they are sort of gaining some students who are trickling down from the elite sector, but they're also losing students who are trickling down to the next sector. So the gains and the losses are sort of balanced, and then the demographic shifts aren't as big.

Now, what gets really tricky, this is like advanced level, right, is that at a lot of the public universities, you actually have seen gains, right, in Black and Latinx students, about 80% have seen gains, although the amount of gain varies quite a bit. You do have a cluster of institutions where there are gains of a couple hundred, right, like more notable, like increases in either Black or Latinx or both in that enrollment.

But what's really interesting about those institutions, like I was looking at this graph in Class Action, this group, they produced this report and they highlighted this cluster of public universities that saw the biggest gains. And I realized the thing that they had in common was that most of these public universities that were gaining more Black and Latinx students, they were not using race-conscious admissions prior to the Supreme Court ruling. So either due to choice or a court case or like state policy laws, right? Like in Michigan.

So in these cases, you had schools, they already experienced that secondary wave. They already lost their Black and Latinx students. And so they have lower baselines to begin with. So when they do gain some Black and Latinx students who are turned away from the elite sector, like they have more to gain, kind of like their percentage gain stands out more, both the absolute number and the percentage gain, because they had these low baselines to begin with. So that's really fascinating. And unfortunately, I didn't realize that in time to put it in the book, but I've been doing it. So this is like, I'm still learning quite a bit after the book, but I've been writing op-eds and other things supported by SSN. Thank you very much. Like, I want to give a shout out to the amazing op-ed support team, Dominik, and Rachel and Wendy at SSN, they have been working double time to help support op-eds and to pitch them, and I'm very grateful for their help.

Lisa: We are definitely always here to help people translate their research to different audiences and make sure that you can supplement the amazing work that you've already done and published. And, you know, you've been talking about how there have been shifts in Black and Latino students, like certainly losing ground, it seems, at selective colleges. And at the same time, some of these elite institutions, they have pointed to enrolling more low-income students as evidence of progress. So you've argued that this is more complicated than it sounds. So what is the catch here?

Julie: Yeah, yeah, it is. At the onset, the numbers look like, wow, like Pell Grant, you know, eligible students are decently up at some of these schools. The funny thing is they changed the formula, right, for Pell Grant eligibility in, I think, 2024, 2023. Professor Sarah Turner at UVA, she pointed this out. She was like, hey, universities who write all these press releases, like, you— there's a catch, right? So they did revise the eligibility criteria, which basically means students at a higher household income can be Pell eligible. And of course, these students need support. So that's great, as long as the Pell Grant program has money. That's like another issue. But that is a big driver of the seeming uptick.

Another point to note, which has been pointed out by Matt Barnum, this journalism, is while there has been like some slight, slight increase in low-income student enrollment, it's far outpaced by the growth by more affluent students. So it's kind of like everyone is growing, but like the group that is growing like far more are like affluent students. And so it's, you know, you win some, you lose some, or I don't even know what to call that. It's imperfect, it's imprecise, right?

We're going off a lot of estimates here, but there have been some attempts to sort of estimate like what would, if you use the old Pell Grant formula, would there be an increase? And it appears there would be some slight but existing increase. I have argued that it's not that this all happened because of the Supreme Court ruling. Yes, is the Supreme Court ruling probably increasing some of the pressure that institutions feel? Like, yes, I think so. But institutions were already rolling out these initiatives, you know, a good amount of time before the ruling.

There's a group called the American Talent Initiative that I talk about in the group, and they have this goal to increase Pell Grant eligible students among their members, which are like, it includes, I think most of the Ivies, if not all of them. And then a lot of like selective and modestly, moderately selective institutions, both public and private. They've been doing this since 2015, but they had a really hard time during the pandemic, understandably, with low-income student enrollment.

So they really put a lot of investment coming out of the pandemic on institutions to like to reverse course and to try to increase low-income student enrollment. So they together collectively member institutions, you know, they made pretty serious increases or substantial increases in financial aid, but they also had member institutions like set very concrete goals for Pell Grant student enrollment, right? So I'm like, hey, wouldn't that have something to do with like this uptick? Like you had these institutions that were setting goals. It's like if you're at 10%, get to 15%. If you're at 15%, try to get to 20%, and so on and so forth.

And so I've argued these initiatives could certainly coexist with race-conscious admissions because they did before 2023. Some people think, oh, it's going to be smooth sailing for economic diversity going on. And I say, actually, you're losing a key tool if you feel muzzled or institutions aren't able to talk freely about race, ethnicity, because there are so many things related to race that overlap with SES, but that are also distinct. The intersections that we see in the racial wealth gap and et cetera are really critical to talk about.

Lisa: So your argument is within the book, and as you're talking right now, is really that race and class aren't interchangeable when it comes to admissions or in general. So why do you think this idea of race and class being interchangeable keeps coming up?

Julie: Yeah, that's a great question. Maybe because it makes sort of like intuitive sense to people. And it's tricky because there is overlap, but then there's also like distinction. Richard Kahlenberg, he wrote his book, *The Remedy*, advocating for class-based affirmative action back in 1996. And he's still going. He just released a new book last year. And so, you know, at the time he was like, oh, you have so many low income, you know, Black, Latino students, et cetera, that if you got rid of race-conscious admissions, he was like, you could just replace them all. You would just have that same amount of racial ethnic diversity. And I think maybe people think like, oh yeah, there are a lot of, and there are a lot of lower income Black and Latinx students.

But the question is, it's not that easy just to like wave a magic wand and that to say like, hey, come in. And then the other thing is just admissions admissions policy is just, it's just more complicated than, you know, it's not like you can't just like move these students around like they're on a checkerboard or on a chessboard.

So with Black students in particular, the sort of the development that we see is you are able to recover some racial ethnic diversity through emphasizing SES, but you're not able to get to the same level that you had under race-conscious admissions 2023 and prior. And part of that is because, you know, you're really, we've lost these tools to attract middle-class Black students, right? And on face value, people think, oh, they're middle-class, they don't really need help. But you know, there's a huge difference between what it means to be like, say, middle income, you know, and Black versus say middle income and Asian American or white, et cetera. And we know in particular for Black students, they're still much more likely to be affected by both the current and residual effects aspects of school segregation, residential segregation, and how that influences access to resources. It's still so real.

And I see it in this area. I live in the DC metro area and you see the huge— you have Prince George's County, which is, I think it's the wealthiest on paper. It has the highest median income or income rate for Black communities, but the opportunities are just not there. There are wonderful things, like huge, great, wonderful things, but they too have been battered, like affected by the effects and continuing effects of residential and school segregation. And so I argue, like, I think those students still do need support.

You know, another development I've been thinking about is why a class-based system, I mean, it's obvious why a class-based system isn't going to reach those students, right? Because they may or may not, they're not going to the ones who aren't Pell Grant eligible, right? But another thing is just admissions itself has changed so much over the last even decade, 5 years, 10 years, where no one can— it feels like no one can get it right without that hook. It's so hypercompetitive where you have these students who have like 4.8 GPA or whatever, you know, 1600, and they're still not getting in, right? They're going to get in somewhere. And a lot of times they get into great schools. But you do have these students who, you know, have these incredible accomplishments and etc., who, because you have these admit rates of like 3% now at some of like the most elite institutions. And so without a hook, and you know, you still have these hooks for white students, athletic preferences, Legacy preferences. But without a hook, it's like, how are you going to make your way through?

And when you really are a lot of times experiencing disadvantage, whether it's your high school doesn't have the advanced curriculum that other high schools have and they don't have the type of support systems that would've gotten you on track to take algebra in 7th or 8th grade so you can have calculus. The system is so unequal. And so without race-conscious admissions, you are gonna have those notable declines, unfortunately, in, in Black and at a lot of schools, Latino enrollment as well.

Lisa: Also, as you were talking here, you mentioned your own neighborhood, right? And in the book, you're very upfront about your own background and how you came to study college admissions. So why was it important for you to include this personal context within this book, and how has your own experience shaped the questions that you ask about admissions?

Julie: You know, I brought it in because number one, like, I enjoy just sort of writing in this, like, conversational tone, and it's nice to, you know, it's a different type of voice than what you use in peer review. But yeah, very much our stories shape, you know, the types of questions we ask and how we come to the data and what things we might take away.

And so, you know, for me, a big part of it was just I served as a consulting expert in Students for Fair Admissions versus Harvard on the side of Harvard. And I think likely part of why I was recruited wasn't because I was Asian American, but it was also because I was Asian American studying selective college admissions at a time when this topic was not on the radar of many researchers and really felt like a very obscure topic. Didn't get a lot of attention when I presented at conferences or whatnot. I thought it was important. I was like, it all hangs on Asian Americans. I was like, if this group, like, decides to raise a fuss, we're, like, going to be in trouble, right? That brought me to the team to work with Harvard, the legal team, and influence, you know, of course, my perspective on the case and just how deeply immersed I was in all of that data.

I talk about remembering, like, seeing for the first time an SAT prep book, but it was also— it happened at church, at the Korean immigrant church that we attended growing up. And so, just, you know, everyone's experience just makes you ask different questions. What does it mean that I learned about that at church of all places, right? Korean immigrant church.

And then later on when I moved to California, you know, I see all of these, you know, in the strip malls of LA, you see all these what Koreans call hagwon, right? After school, Kumon, that type of thing, right? SAT prep, et cetera. And so then I was like, oh, I'm so interested in that. I want to study it. And, you know, and I ended up studying that.

As a child of immigrants who came over here, you know, for my dad to get a PhD, right? Like, we're just not a random sampling of people from Asia, right? So I understand that world, and I understand the world of people who, like, are invested in test scores and think that they're the end-all be-all. I don't agree with it, but I understand that world. But I also have been immersed in the world of just being able to— and partially, I think I have race-conscious admissions, like, to thank for this— like, of getting to go to college with people from different race ethnicities, working with people of different race ethnicities, and just seeing that like brilliance and talent just like isn't always— sometimes it comes out in a test score, but sometimes it doesn't. And just, you know, I think that understanding has shaped some of my thoughts on standardized tests, that I don't think they're the end-all be-all. Like, yes, they can be a tool, but let's be open to the other ways that people show talent.

I think that's, as an Asian American, Asian Americans have, right, been kind of caught in the middle of this debate from the side of the community that thinks it's a good idea to sue Harvard. And then you have this huge side of the community that pushed back and said like, no, like we have benefited from affirmative action and we need these policies. We need to be able to consider race, right, in policy and in the law, et cetera. And so I think when you're in the community, you just, you see both sides and that for me, it's influenced my own perspective.

Lisa: Given all of the constraints, legal constraints that colleges are facing here, what are some strategies that colleges can use or are using right now that genuinely help enroll more diverse student bodies even in this new legal landscape?

Julie: Yeah, well, I can start by telling you what probably won't work, right? I hear this idea, all the, like, lotteries. Like, people are like, it's so random, let's just do a lottery. Lottery, you know, Dominique Baker, Mike Bastedo, I highlight their research and others in the book that just says like when you actually try a lottery, like you lose diversity related to substantially related to race ethnicity, substantially related to SES, and then also gender, men.

Like that's another thing I don't even talk about in the book, but there's a big thumb on the scale for men, right? So it'll be interesting to see what happens in the future with that, with the Trump administration's push towards, let's just use grades and test scores. It's like, oh, you're going to lose a lot of men. So lotteries.

And then I talk about practices that are counterproductive that unfortunately institutions are still doing, like athletic recruitment and then also legacy admissions. In terms of things that can facilitate, I talk about diversity and outreach and thinking strategically, right? You have to tailor events so they are open to everyone, but you can still talk about and celebrate and highlight communities of color on campus, right? And how— whether that can be a recruitment tool, a tool for outreach and yield, because I don't think it's just students of color who want to attend a campus that has diversity. White students want to too. And so for instance, I highlight programs like Yale has this like event around their multicultural open house. It's open to everyone. It seems like it's a promising event.

I do talk about direct financial aid, like pushing out financial aid offers. So make it more upfront for students from the beginning. Like, this is what you're gonna pay, especially if it's, you're not gonna pay tuition. Let them know that without proof of eligibility. So we had a series of studies from University of Michigan that looked at an initiative they had where they just, you know, they targeted students based on, I think, attending high schools with high free and reduced lunch, et cetera. And they didn't even say you're admitted to Michigan. Like they said, if you apply and get in, you will not pay tuition. But they did that without saying, and you have to file FAFSA first and all of that stuff. And that made a difference, right? In terms of supporting low-income student enrollment.

So it's interesting because you do have these like free tuition programs, but they usually require proof of eligibility. And those programs don't tend to see the types of gains in low-income student enrollment. And so, you know, really reducing efforts to reduce friction in the process, I think, are helpful.

Yes, there are things institutions can do, but there are also things they really need to just stop doing. So beyond the other things I talked about, like prioritizing need-based aid over merit aid is a huge one. Public universities, they do a lot of out-of-state recruitment where they target predominantly white, wealthy high schools. So it's just like, oh, are you surprised that these are the students that you're getting, right? And so there are things they have to start doing, but there are also things they need to stop doing.

Lisa: Certainly, like, we've, you know, we can go probably on and on about all the different changes that have happened over the last couple of even months. But for listeners trying to keep track of all of this, as we close out here, what is one thing that you think people should be paying attention to over this next year?

Julie: I would just say, I mean, pay attention to Black enrollment, like what happens to Black student enrollment. Not many schools released fall 2025 data. And so, I mean, the schools that did, like, we're seeing drops. And is this trend going to continue? Like, the more years we are out from the decision, like, the more confident we can be in saying like, okay, this is real. I mean, I think right now we're like, yes, this is real, we're seeing an impact. But to see like, is what's happening in fall 2026.

And with that, the two-wave cascade effect that I talked about, the impact of the return back to required testing is something I'm keeping an eye at, at the handful of institutions that have gone back to it. And then there's also this ACTS survey that the Trump administration like put out this data collection call for institutions, like this list of very unreasonable potential invasion of privacy-related data that institutions, they like even 18 states even sued the Trump administration to say like, we just can't pull this data together, but some of the data is gonna come in. So what is the Trump administration gonna do with it? I think a lot of us are worried. So that's another thing to keep an eye on.

Lisa: Absolutely. Well, you know, even when we're going through the different attacks on education and changes in admissions I look forward to your curiosity guiding our conversations here. So thank you so much for coming on No Jargon and sharing so much of your expertise today.

Julie: Yeah, thank you very much, Lisa.

Lisa: And thanks for listening. For more on Professor Park's work, check out our show notes at scholars.org/nojargon. No Jargon is the podcast of of the Scholar Strategy Network, a nationwide organization that connects journalists, policymakers, and civic leaders with America's top researchers to improve policy and strengthen democracy. The producers of our show are Wendy Chow and Dominic Doemer. Our audio engineer is Peter Linnane. If you liked our show, please subscribe and rate us on Apple Podcasts or wherever you get your shows. You can give us feedback on X, formerly known as Twitter, [@NoJargonPodcast](https://twitter.com/NoJargonPodcast), or at our email address, nojargon@scholars.org.