In 1957, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter articulated the “four essential freedoms” of a university—“to determine for itself on academic grounds who may teach, what may be taught, how it shall be taught, and who may be admitted to study.” Last week, more than 50 years after Frankfurter’s elegant formulation, the Supreme Court reaffirmed the fourth of these freedoms. The decision in Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin et al. leaves intact the longstanding legal principle that the educational benefits of a widely diverse student body are a compelling governmental interest. We strongly agree.

The case now returns to the Fifth Circuit for review under clarified standards of strict scrutiny, and it will be some time before there is a final decision. But a central issue for colleges and universities—the educational benefits of diversity—remains unchanged.

A diverse student body enables all students to have the transformational experience of interacting with their peers who have varied perspectives and come from different backgrounds. These experiences, which are highly valued by employers because of their importance in the workplace, also prepare students with the skills they need to live in an interconnected world and to be more engaged citizens. Our economic future, democracy, and global standing will suffer if the next generation is not ready to engage and work with people whose backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives are different from their own.

Our nation’s higher education institutions, whether they are community colleges or four-year institutions, public or private, nonprofit or for-profit, religiously affiliated or secular, professional, vocational, or liberal-arts focused, stand committed to furthering the goals of equal opportunity and diversity in education.

We pledge to reinvigorate our work to ensure that all who enroll in higher education experience a rigorous, horizon-expanding, and intellectually challenging education. We remain dedicated to the mission of discovering and disseminating knowledge, including the knowledge gained through direct experiences with diverse colleagues—a resource for achieving a stronger democracy and nation.