

American campuses reward merit

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The interview of **Alessandro**, and the story of **Martina** provided an interesting view of how universities work abroad. **It was immediately clear** that that the economic and financial aspects lay at the heart of their choice. We went to check, especially in the farthest and, therefore, apparently the less accessible, place: **MIT in Boston**. What emerged was a picture that would embarrass the people in command, in Italy.

Starting with transparency, the difference in style is immediately noticeable. **Daniel Barkowitz** is the director of financial aid at MIT, and he **manages a blog** that contains complete information. At “his” university, **nearly 30% of the students do not pay a cent to enrol, attend or live**. This treatment is reserved for people whose income is less than \$75,000. There are also a series of reductions for people with higher incomes.

However, **this is not an isolated case**, because the most important American universities (Harvard, Princeton, etc.) employ an admission system known as “**need-blind admission**”, which means that every student’s application is examined without considering his financial resources. Then, anyone who is accepted must send a copy of the family’s tax return; after this, the university provides “**need-based financial aid**”, that is, the student receives **a study grant that pays for everything that the income cannot cover** (often, the study grant covers all of the expenses.) In addition, the university offers students many opportunities of paid work, as laboratory assistants, tutors, etc, the purpose of which is to implement meritocracy in full.

But what about MIT students (especially international students) that come from remote parts of the planet, very often with limited financial resources. **The story of E. G. is a good example**; he grew up near a rice field, in a small village in the West of the island of Java. On taking part in the Mathematics Olympics, he came to hear about MIT; he applied for a place, was admitted, and went to live on campus. It is only thanks to the purely meritocratic system that the great American universities can attract and offer opportunities to talented people from all over the world.

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