

1 of 999 DOCUMENTS

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## Top 10 rule limits UT, says its leader; Powers argues forced admission blocks diversity

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AUSTIN - The University of Texas at Austin has been forced to offer admission to a record number of Texas high school students using just a single criteria - class ranking - and that has hurt the university's ability to increase its racial and ethnic diversity, the school's president said Wednesday.

Eighty-one percent of the students being offered admission to UT's 2008 fall freshman class got in because they graduated in the top 10 percent of their high schools. That number is up 10 percent over 2007 figures and likely will rise to include all students in the not-too-distant future, William Powers Jr. warned.

On Wednesday and in testimony before a House panel a day earlier, Powers said the university could attract a more diverse student body if it was not forced by the state, under a decade-old law, to accept every student with a high class rank.

"Only about one in four students admitted under the top 10 percent law is African-American or Hispanic, so there's a natural limit if we don't have discretion in who we can go after," he said. "It's a capacity problem."

Powers supports capping at 50 percent the number of incoming freshmen admitted by UT-Austin under the top 10 percent law, and giving admission officers more discretion to use other factors, including race, when considering the rest.

Limiting the law has been a tough sell for Powers, particularly in long-neglected areas of the state. UT-Austin's minority enrollment is higher now than at any time since the law was passed.

From 1998 to 2007, the number of Hispanic undergraduates has risen by 29.3 percent to 6,700.

The percentage of African-American students has jumped by 32.4 percent to 1,700. UT's total undergraduate population stood last fall at a little more than 37,000.

Equal opportunity

Rep. Helen Giddings, D-Dallas, co-authored the top 10 percent law in response to a federal ruling that officials in

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Texas believed barred race from being used in admission decisions.

The rule applies to every public institution in the state and gives equal opportunity to top students at any public school.

She credits her law with boosting enrollment at UT from both inner city and rural schools. She said UT's flagship school drew students from 616 Texas high schools in 1996, and now draws from 853 high schools.

"We cannot back away from making sure that these universities reflect the population of the state," she said.

Mike Villarreal, D-San Antonio, said the university's admissions policy seems "to be working very well." He was part of a coalition of urban Democrats and rural conservatives that last year defeated a bill that would have instituted the 50 percent cap.

#### Disadvantaged groups

Powers said the emphasis on class ranking excludes other measures that have proved to boost enrollment among disadvantaged groups, such as ensuring that high-performing students from disadvantaged backgrounds actually are able to attend college.

Powers said UT's outreach and scholarship efforts have been at least as important in bringing in underrepresented students.

Speaking before a House panel on higher education on Tuesday, he added that class ranking leaves an entire set of students in the cold: the Bill Gateses and Michael Dells of the world who showed exceptional talent in some areas, but didn't necessarily have high grade-point averages.

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#### MINORITY INCREASE

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