

# Study: Texas '10 percent plan' fails to sustain diversity

By Eric Quiñones

Princeton NJ -- The Texas "10 percent plan," promoted as a tool to ensure diversity in higher education following a ban on affirmative action, has failed to sustain minority admission and enrollment at the state's flagship universities, according to a new study led by Princeton sociologist Marta Tienda.

"Although Texas is rapidly becoming a 'majority minority state,' the demographic profile of the two public flagships has failed to keep pace with the growth of minority groups among college-age students," according to the study, "Closing the Gap?: Texas College Enrollments Before and After Affirmative Action."

After a federal court outlawed affirmative action in the 1996 case Hopwood vs. Texas, Texas legislators in 1998 instituted a plan in which high school graduates in the top 10 percent of their class are guaranteed admission to any state university. The Texas plan has gained renewed attention as the Supreme Court prepares to hear two lawsuits challenging the University of Michigan's affirmative action admission policies.

"The 10 percent plan is not an alternative to affirmative action," Tienda said. "It will not and has not restored the pre-Hopwood diversity."

Tienda said the study is the first to analyze application, admission and enrollment data from 1990 to 2000 from the University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M University, the only public universities in the state that had practiced affirmative action prior to the Hopwood ruling.

The study demonstrates that rates of admission for minority applicants at Texas' flagship institutions fell sharply after the ban on affirmative action. For African Americans applying to Texas A&M, the probability of admission fell from 74.9 percent pre-Hopwood to 57.7 percent after Hopwood, while the admission probability for Hispanic applicants dropped from 79.9 percent to 68.3 percent. At UT-Austin, admission probability fell from 71.3 percent to 69.3 percent for African-American applicants and from 77.7 percent to 76.3 percent for Hispanics. In the same period, the probability of admission for white students rose from 73.7 percent to 74.3 percent at Texas A&M and from 73.6 percent to 80.6 percent at UT-Austin.

## **Fewer minorities enrolled**

Due to the lower probability of admission for minority candidates and fewer minority applicants since the ruling, the numbers of enrolled minority students fell. Prior to Hopwood, African Americans represented 3.7 percent of Texas A&M enrollees, but only

2.4 percent after the ruling. For Hispanics, the corresponding drop was from 12.6 percent to 9.2 percent. Similar declines were witnessed at UT-Austin, where African-American enrollees dropped from 4 percent to 3.3 percent and the Hispanic share fell from 15.8 percent to 13.7 percent.

In contrast, African Americans and Hispanics together represented more than half of Texas' college-age population in 2000, at 12.3 percent and 40 percent, respectively. White students represented 43.5 percent of the college-age population and Asian Americans accounted for 2.9 percent.

The decline in minority admission was less drastic at UT-Austin due to an aggressive outreach plan, the UT Longhorn Scholars program, which recruited students from high schools with relatively large economically disadvantaged and minority student bodies. Texas A&M recently implemented the Century Scholars program, modeled after the Longhorn Scholars, hoping to restore its campus diversity to pre-Hopwood levels.

Tienda said the study illustrates a need to maintain race-conscious admission policies, an issue at the forefront of higher education with the Supreme Court set to address it this spring for the first time since its historic Bakke decision in 1978.

"The important lesson is the lesson we learned in 1978. If we want to diversify our institutions of higher education, if we want the public flagships to play a role in creating a community of leaders among all segments of the population, then for the time being -- when we have very egregious inequities in access -- it is necessary to take race into account," she said.

"This is not a position I held before I began doing research on the problem. I felt that affirmative action had played itself out. Once I began doing the research, my opinion changed completely because the facts do not justify the conclusion of a color-blind policy at this point," Tienda added.

The study noted that graduates in the top 10 percent of their high schools were admitted with "near certainty" to Texas public universities prior to the Hopwood ruling, meaning the race and ethnic differences in their probability of admission were negligible. But for graduates in the second and third deciles of their high school classes, those differences were significant -- with admission of African-American and Hispanic students in those categories declining at Texas A&M and UT-Austin since the ruling.

At Texas A&M, the admission probability of students ranked in the second decile of their senior class fell from 85.3 percent to 71.7 percent for African Americans and from 86.9 percent to 75.9 percent for Hispanics. The corresponding figures for UT-Austin drop from 78.7 percent to 73.8 percent for African Americans and from 81.8 to 79.5 percent for Hispanics. At Texas A&M, the admission probability of similarly ranked white and Asian-American students rose from 80.2 percent to 83.9 percent and from 72.7 percent to 75.7 percent, respectively, after the Hopwood decision. Likewise, at UT-Austin, the admission probability of white and Asian-American students in the 80th to 89th

percentile of their class jumped from 80.4 percent to 91.1 percent and from 75.3 percent to 92.4 percent, respectively, after affirmative action was banned.

Tienda said the study disproves criticism that the plan puts the state's traditionally higher-performing "feeder" high schools at a disadvantage by automatically admitting the top 10 percent of lower-achieving urban schools, since the top 10 percent of students from all schools were admitted with "near certainty" prior to Hopwood.

### **Five-year investigation**

The study is part of a five-year investigation into admission policies in Texas, funded by the Ford Foundation. Tienda and her colleagues will now begin analyzing recently obtained data on applicants, admission and enrollment from Southern Methodist University and Rice University, two of the state's most selective private institutions, as well as other public institutions.

The researchers also are studying the results of a statewide survey of Texas college seniors conducted in spring 2002 in an effort to better understand the college decision-making process. Tienda said that study should help explain why the percentage of minorities among college applicants has declined in Texas since 1996.

Tienda is the Maurice P. Daring '22 Professor in Demographic Studies and a professor of sociology and public affairs at Princeton. Her research interests and writings focus on race and gender inequality and various aspects of the sociology of economic life. Tienda is the co-editor of "Youth in Cities: A Cross-National Perspective," published in 2002, and co-author of "The Color of Opportunity: Pathways to Family, Work and Welfare in the Inner City," published in 2001.

The new study's co-authors are Kevin Leicht, a sociology professor at the University of Iowa; Teresa Sullivan, executive vice chancellor for academic affairs of the University of Texas system and a professor of sociology and law at the University of Texas at Austin; and Michael Maltese, research assistant, and Kim Lloyd, visiting research fellow, at Princeton's Office of Population Research.