

<http://chronicle.com/daily/2003/01/2003012401n.htm>

January 24, 2003

Texas Admissions Plan Has Not Increased Diversity at Flagship Campuses, Study Finds

By [WILL POTTER](#)

The "top 10 percent" plan used for admission to public universities in Texas has failed to restore minority enrollments to their levels when affirmative action was permitted, according to a study released Thursday by a team of sociologists.

The study's release came barely a week after the Bush administration filed legal briefs urging the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor's affirmative-action admissions policies ([The Chronicle](#), January 20). The briefs argue that colleges must exhaust all race-neutral means for diversifying their student bodies before they can legally use race as a factor in admitting students. As an example of such means, President Bush has cited the Texas plan and similar percentage plans in California and Florida, which guarantee admission to students who graduate within some top proportion of their high-school class.

The Texas plan guarantees automatic admission to any public university in Texas to any student in the state in the top 10 percent of his or her graduating class. Legislators adopted the plan in 1998, following a 1996 ruling by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, in *Hopwood v. Texas*, that banned affirmative action in the state ([The Chronicle](#), March 29, 1996).

"The 10-percent plan is not an alternative to affirmative action," said Marta Tienda, a sociologist at Princeton University and the lead author of a report on the study. "It will not and has not restored the pre-*Hopwood* diversity." The report's co-authors are two other sociologists at Princeton and one each at the University of Iowa and the University of Texas at Austin.

The report, titled "Closing the Gap? Admissions and Enrollments at the Texas Public Flagships Before and After Affirmative Action," analyzed application, admission, and enrollment data from 1990 to 2000 at the University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M University at College Station, the state's two most selective public universities.

Enrollment of minority students at both universities fell sharply after the ban, the report said, because of a lower number of minority applicants and a lower probability of admission for minority students. Texas as a whole, however, is becoming a "majority

minority" state, with demographers predicting that by 2005 the Hispanic population will become the state's dominant ethnic group.

According to the report, African-American students made up 2.4 percent of Texas A&M enrollees after *Hopwood*, down from 3.7 percent before the ruling. Hispanic students represented 9.2 percent of enrollees at the university after the ruling, down from 12.6 percent before.

The University of Texas saw similar changes, the report said. African-American enrollees dropped to 3.3 percent, from 4 percent before *Hopwood*. Hispanic students represented 13.7 percent of enrollees after *Hopwood*, and 15.8 percent before.

The study used ranges of years, rather than specific years, in computing those percentages. It defined pre-*Hopwood* as 1992 to 1996, and post-*Hopwood* as 1997 to 2000, a period that includes one academic year before the 10-percent plan was enacted.

Ms. Tienda said that before undertaking the study, she thought affirmative action had "played itself out," but that she now supports race-conscious admission policies.

Michael A. Olivas, a professor of law at the University of Houston's main campus and an architect of the 10-percent plan, said its efficacy has to be examined in light of other options.

"Certainly this plan hasn't kept Texas from falling behind," he said. "But we needed a response to the handcuffs placed on us by the Fifth Circuit court, and given the unique demographics of the state, this was the best legislative response. Would I prefer going back to the 'good old days' before *Bakke* and *Hopwood*? Absolutely."

Regents of the University of California v. Bakke is the landmark 1978 Supreme Court decision that said that colleges could consider race and ethnicity as factors in admissions decisions, but could not designate set numbers of spaces for members of specific ethnic and racial groups.

The study released Thursday is part of the Texas Top 10% Project, a five-year investigation into admission policies in Texas. Researchers will next turn to data on admissions and enrollment at private universities in the state.