

# Transfer students flock to Austin

By Patrick Mcgee

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AUSTIN - With more students -- and their advocates -- clamoring for seats at the popular University of Texas at Austin, an intense interest in "feeder" schools has emerged.

But while everyone's looking to see which high schools send the most students to UT, many are missing a transfer-student invasion that strongly favors two institutions and dwarfs any feeder high school's contribution.

Clements High School in Sugar Land was the top feeder school last year, sending 103 of its graduates to UT, but a UT sister institution and a nearby community college sent far more as transfers.

UT-San Antonio sent 592 students to UT-Austin. All other universities combined sent 708. Austin Community College sent 219, slightly less than all other community colleges combined.

These students are pouring in through the back door as it's getting tougher to get a spot at UT. Applications have increased by 50 percent in just a decade, and nearly three-quarters of last year's freshmen were students in the top 10 percent of their high school class who were guaranteed a spot by state law.

UT-San Antonio and ACC have "kind of become satellites to UT-Austin. They kind of become a support system to help UT-Austin deal with the capacity problem," said Marta Tienda, a Princeton University sociologist who has studied UT-Austin's admissions and struggles to become more diverse.

Tienda's study is part of the spotlight on admission to the state's largest public university. Minority advocacy groups, high schools and parents all want an admissions process that favors them.

The competition has become a political issue. State lawmakers pore over the university's admissions policies and enrollment figures with more interest than they have for most higher education issues.

In response to the controversy, UT-Austin officials cast a wide net in freshman recruiting to pull together a diverse student body from across the state.

But the rather meager, hard-won diversity gains are diminished a bit by the transfers.

Last year, blacks made up 4.6 percent of freshmen and 3.2 percent of transfers. Hispanics made up 17.2 percent of freshmen and 13.9 percent of transfers, according to UT-Austin data.

UT-Austin admissions director Bruce Walker said that these numbers go up and down and that there's not as much favoritism toward ACC and UT-San Antonio students as it might first seem.

He said UT-Austin officials visit other community colleges when they recruit in minority communities, but community college students are scattered and hard to reach.

Most of the UT-San Antonio students are in UT's Coordinated Admissions Program, which gives rejected applicants a second shot at becoming Longhorns; they're guaranteed a transfer to UT-Austin's sophomore class if they make a 3.2-grade-point average in an academic year in the CAP program at another UT institution.

UT-Austin officials recently had to increase the GPA requirement because so many students were crowding into the CAP program trying to get into UT-Austin.

The University of Texas at Arlington is also a big player in the CAP program. Transferring 270 students to UT-Austin last year, it was second only to UT-San Antonio.

UT-San Antonio admissions director George Norton said most of UT-San Antonio's CAP students are from Houston, the state's largest city, which has no UT campus.

Walker acknowledged, however, that the cultures of UT-San Antonio and ACC have become favorable to students hoping to transfer to UT-Austin; they can't help but bump into counselors and even classmates who know what steps to take.

UT-San Antonio and ACC students said their schools are full of people trying to become Longhorns and counselors who know -- to the very last detail -- how to meet the requirements.

Preethi Mabbu, a UT-San Antonio sophomore who decided to stay on that campus after going through the CAP program, said counselors had her on a strict program of courses to make it to Austin.

"They don't let you go outside that list and make other changes," she said. "If you go out of that list you're not eligible any more."

Elroy Hendricks said he stuck to a similar program at ACC and transferred to the university with ease.

"Every class I took transferred to UT," he said. "I think the instructors here did an excellent job getting me to the next step."

ACC student Kristina Welch said her instructors are so familiar with UT-Austin that they have even recommended professors she should study with when she transfers.

CHART: A back door to UT; STAR-TELEGRAM DAVE SEYMOUR

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