

Study: Top 10 law not curbing college choices

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Texas universities' top 10 percent admission law does not keep smart students who fail to graduate at the top of their class from getting into the state's most competitive universities, according to a new study.

The Princeton University study, released Monday, also found that the law has not created an exodus of the state's brightest students to out-of-state schools, as some critics have feared.

The study's findings debunks common perceptions about the law, which grants all students who graduate in the top 10 percent of their class automatic admission to any Texas public college.

Researchers interviewed 13,803 Texas high school seniors about their college plans in 2002. A year later, they re-interviewed a random sample of 5,200 students to determine where they actually enrolled.

The study found that 75 percent of high-achieving students who did not graduate in the top 10 percent were still able to enroll at Texas A&M or the University of Texas if they wanted, and 71 percent whose top choice was another four-year state school also got accepted.

"Statistically, those are very high percentages," said Marta Tienda, a Princeton professor of sociology and public affairs and the lead author of the study. "There may be some students being squeezed out, but the data shows that students ranking just below the top 10 percent are definitely more successful at enrolling in Texas' flagship universities than lower-ranked high school graduates."

The study also found that most students in the top 10 percent who wanted to attend a Texas college ended up enrolling at one - dispelling the "brain drain" theory that they are being forced to attend out-of-state schools because the law restricts their in-state enrollment options.

In fact, high-achieving students had a tougher time getting accepted to out-of-state schools, the study said. While nearly three-quarters of the top 10 percent students attended their Texas school of choice, less than percent of them who wanted to attend a school outside of Texas got in.

Officials at the University of Texas and Texas A&M - the state's two flagships schools - said the Princeton study confirms their experiences with the 10 percent law since it was put into place in 1997.

Bruce Walker, head of admissions at UT, said the law had squeezed some smart students out of the admission process. But on the whole, it hasn't closed the doors to deserving students, he said.

Lawmakers adopted the law after the Hopwood decision banned racial preferences in state university admissions. The law has been credited with helping Texas universities maintain diversity despite the ruling.

Texas was the first state to implement such a law, and California and Florida followed.

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