

## Texas' "Ten Percenters"

**In the absence of affirmative action, the state struggles to increase minority enrollments**

By Carl Irving

AUSTIN, TEXAS

**L**ESS THAN TWO YEARS after arriving as a self-described "fearful freshman" on the sprawling University of Texas campus, with its 49,000-plus students, sophomore Karla Vargas has achieved a 3.5 grade point average, and she hopes to qualify for law school.

One of the first of a slowly growing number of Hispanic "ten percenters" from working class families, recruited after affirmative action was banned, Vargas is eager to make the most of her opportunity.

"With four siblings, I've got pressures to succeed," she said.

Vargas, 20, graduated from a Dallas high school attended mostly by Hispanic and African American students from low-income families. She is the daughter of immigrant parents and the first in her family to go to college.

Vargas and students with similar backgrounds came here from high schools that

rarely, if ever, had sent their graduates to Austin, flagship campus of the University of Texas system, until admissions policies were changed and recruiters began track-

*Thanks to the new scholarships and recruiting efforts, Hispanic and African American undergraduate enrollments at UT-Austin are almost back to the level of 1996, the last year of affirmative action admissions.*

ing them down and offering many, including Vargas, special scholarships.

Like other students of similar backgrounds interviewed here, Vargas was glad

that her admission to one of the state's two most selective public campuses (Texas A&M-College Station is the other) came after a 1996 Federal appellate court decision banned race-based affirmative action policies. The federal case dealt with the University of Texas law school but the state attorney general subsequently applied it to all public campuses.

"Before that, a lot of people got a bad rap, claiming that minorities were favored," she said.

In 1997 the Texas legislature, with bipartisan support, passed a bill providing that the top ten percent of graduating seniors in each of the state's 1,644 public high schools (measured by grades, without regard to test scores) were automatically eligible for admission to a public college or university. The bill was signed into law by then-Governor George W. Bush.

In 2000, there were 21,000 "ten per-



JANA BIRCHUM, BLACK STAR FOR CROSSTALK

*Special recruiting efforts and scholarships have brought students like 20-year-old sophomore Karla Vargas to the University of Texas campus in Austin.*

centers." Nearly 12,000 of them enrolled at Texas public campuses: Sixty-four percent of these 12,000 were white, 18 percent Hispanic, ten percent Asian, six percent

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## High Marks

**Mounting evidence of "grade inflation" across the country**

By Jon Marcus

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

**I**T WAS ONE of the year's hottest topics in higher education, and convincing evidence of long-suspected grade inflation in the Ivy League: the disclosure that Harvard University was awarding honors to more than 90 percent

*Grade inflation has been effectively documented by researchers—and disputed by university administrators—since the 1960s.*

of its graduating seniors. But an equally dramatic event was occurring largely out of public notice at the Washington University in St. Louis School of Law.

Concerned that its graduates were at a growing disadvantage in a job market flooded with students who were coasting

through the Ivies with inflated grades, the law school adjusted its own grading scale. The outcome: Even as Harvard was being forced to make changes to restrain its students' seemingly out-of-control GPAs, the median grade at the Washington law school was inflated from a B-minus to a B-plus.

The faculty approved the change, but not unanimously. Dissenters said they feared a "price war." "It's a way of dealing with the problem that doesn't really solve anything," said one of the skeptics, law professor Richard Kuhns. "It's ironic that when places like Harvard are finally doing something about their grading policies, we've done something that keeps the thing going. The solution should not be to just jump on the bandwagon."

It's a bandwagon that has considerable momentum, however. Grade inflation has been effectively documented by researchers—and disputed by university administrators—since the 1960s. Even the last year's worth of embarrassing revelations, including a report showing that the proportion of straight-A students has quadrupled in the last three decades, seems to be having little impact.



BRIAN CASSIDY, BLACK STAR FOR CROSSTALK

*Law professor Richard Kuhns objects to the Washington University in St. Louis law school's policy of inflating all student grades.*

"It's hard to unilaterally disarm," said Valen Johnson, author of the forthcoming book, "College Grading: A National Crisis in Undergraduate Education," and a professor of statistics, who will move from Duke to the University of Michigan this fall. At Duke, Johnson led an unsuccessful campaign to adjust grades by accounting for variations in grading policies of different professors and departments.

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## In This Issue



GEORGE ROBINSON, BLACK STAR FOR CROSSTALK

**'C**ollege shouldn't be a factory," says Bennington College senior Mary Catherine La Mar, who left Columbia University for the creative freedom of Bennington. (See page 3.)



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## NEWS FROM THE CENTER

# Center Program Associates

**T**HIRTEEN MID-CAREER professionals have been selected as Program Associates by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education for 2002-2003. The Associates program, supported by the Ford Foundation, is designed to engage scholars and leaders interested in

addressing current public policy issues in higher education through involvement in the work of the National Center.

The new Associates attend three policy symposiums a year and contribute in other ways to the National Center's agenda and activities. ♦



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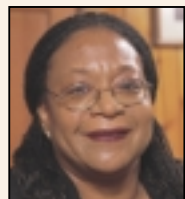
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PHOTOS BY DENNIS BRACK, BLACK STAR, FOR CROSSTALK

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Bearing the burden of high tuition

Editor—I have a 21-year-old daughter, Casey, who is attending Manatee Community College, Bradenton, Florida. She hopes to enroll at the University of Florida as an occupational therapist. She is just completing her second year at MCC and will continue to take required courses at the community college level because it is affordable. The program at the University of Florida will take another three years, to complete a master's degree.

Casey was not eligible for a Florida "Bright Futures" scholarship because her SATs were too low, even though she had a B average and was active in many service organizations. We do not qualify for a Pell Grant, because our \$60,000 annual income is too high.

So what do we do? My husband and I both work. Casey works. She also receives a scholarship from our church. It is not easy! Casey will work the entire summer to help pay off some of her debts and save for the years of higher tuition costs at UF.

Every year tuition costs are being raised. We barely scratch by. I also attend MCC part time, and in two years our son will be attending college. I envision my entire salary going to pay for their education, with little extra money for anything else. The future years will be difficult but we are determined that our children will have an

education that will guarantee a better life and a more financially stable one.

As a middle class family, we are bearing the full burden of our children's education, with little help from our government. It would be a relief to have help in producing individuals who will one day be a benefit to this country.

Diane E. Thompson

### Clarification on Clemson

Editor—My name is Jay Ragley and I am a graduating senior from Clemson University, in Clemson, South Carolina. I recently read your report, "Losing Ground," about rising higher education costs in the U.S. Your comment about Clemson University was not very clear. Tuition was raised by 42 percent, but the one-time \$600 rebate only applied to in-state students for the fall semester, while out-of-state students paid the full increase.

Please do not give the Board of Trustees any credit for this generous reduction more than they already have been given. Other than this oversight, I think your report was well written and important to parents, students, faculty, administrators and legislators across the country. Great job!

Jay Ragley,  
Clemson, South Carolina

## CORRECTIONS

In "Losing Ground," a report published this spring by The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (which also publishes *National CrossTalk*) it was stated that the University of Virginia plans to recruit more out-of-state undergraduates, to help compensate for a cut in state support. This is not correct. The university plans to maintain its current ratio of about 68 percent in-state undergraduate students, 32 percent out-of-state.

An article about Olin College, in the spring 2002 issue of *National CrossTalk*, said that freshman applicant Frances Haugen had been accepted by Yale, Princeton, Brown, MIT and Caltech. MIT and Caltech were correct; Yale, Princeton and Brown were not.

An article about California's Advanced Placement program in the spring issue stated that there are 651 regular high schools in the state. The correct number is 935.

# On Its Own Terms

**After a controversial restructuring, Bennington College continues its non-traditional approach**

By Kathy Witkowsky

BENNINGTON, VERMONT

**O**NE OF THREE essay questions included on the Bennington College application is this: Design a structure or series of structures to define a play area that creates the thrill of the unknown.

One possible response: Submit a map of the school itself. Located on the gentle slopes of a 550-acre former dairy farm in southern Vermont, the college is dedicated to the notion that students should explore and follow their passions, trust their instincts, and find work so engaging that it feels like play.

On a chilly spring night, in a small classroom in “the Barn,” Bennington’s modest version of main hall, college president Elizabeth Coleman—Liz, as she’s known to both faculty and students—demonstrated how she translates that philosophy into practice. A handsome woman with a shock of gray hair and an air of authority, Coleman, 64, listened intently as each of her seven literature students described the challenges they were encountering in their independent studies. One by one, Coleman responded to their concerns.

- To a freshman who had chosen to study Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* (a play so obscure that Coleman herself hadn’t previously read it): Think about why this particular Greek tragedy engages you. Don’t worry so much about what the critics say; look to yourself to puzzle through it.
- To a student intrigued but overwhelmed by conservation issues: You’re afraid of failure? What exactly would that be? Nothing’s perfect. Just try to figure out which conservation issues matter to you, and why.
- And to a student writing about magic realism, but struggling to focus (“I’m literally exploding with ideas!” the student exclaimed, when it finally was her turn to speak): Continue writing stream of consciousness, then address one particular question or issue that comes up.

“I think all schools should treat students like Bennington treats students,” said Coleman, herself a product of a much more traditional education at the University of Chicago. In her usual pull-no-punches style, she had a blunt one-word response for those who believe that only a select group of highly motivated and self-directed students can benefit from the school’s no-requirements, optional-grades approach: “Bullshit!”

Discovering your passions and taking responsibility for yourself is something that all students should learn, she said.

The intensity of her students’ intellectual curiosity—and Coleman’s respect for their abilities—would have been noteworthy under any circumstances. That this scene was unfolding just eight years after Coleman led Bennington through a radical and highly controversial restructuring was

a remarkable testament to her leadership, which her fans call brilliant, her critics call autocratic, and nearly everyone considers fearless.

Once headed toward bankruptcy, Bennington is not only solvent, it is once again in the vanguard of progressive education. Enrollment, finances and morale are all up, and Coleman is getting the credit for it.

“Liz created one of the great economically motivated changes at the school, making it look like principle and not desperation,” said Arthur Levine, president of Teachers’ College at Columbia University. “I can’t think of one other college president in America who could pull that off.”

Historically tuition-dependent, the tiny liberal arts school faced skyrocketing costs, plunging enrollment and a \$1 million deficit during the early 1990s. In addition, according to Coleman, the school was adrift and sinking fast.

Since its founding in 1932 as an all-women’s college (it became co-educational in 1969, though women still comprise 70 percent of undergraduates), Bennington had considered itself a leader in progressive education, the place where Martha Graham began to develop modern dance, and Buckminster Fuller built one of his first geodesic domes. But in more recent years, it was perhaps best known as the most expensive college in the country, as well as being a place for “artsy weirdos in the woods,” as director of admissions Deane Bogardus put it.

Although it no longer is even close to being the most expensive college, Bennington still attracts artists and independent thinkers. With the help of faculty advisers, students design their own curricula, which gives them the ability to pursue unusual academic combinations: science

***Bennington College is dedicated to the notion that students should explore and follow their passions, trust their instincts, and find work so engaging that it feels like play.***

and theater; photography and mediation; biology and international relations. If they want to study a subject that is not offered, they are expected to arrange a tutorial. Many colleges will allow students to design their own programs; the difference at Bennington is that all students must do so.

“You’re put on the line in terms of your education,” explained Abbey Salon, 23, of Ridgefield, Connecticut. After her sophomore year at Clark University, Salon transferred to Bennington, where she is studying literature and earning a master’s degree in teaching. At Clark, she said, “You have a set amount of courses. There’s no asking what your education is. Here you’re asked

to justify everything.”

“There aren’t many institutions where the students even know what the pedagogy of the school is or means,” noted admissions director Bogardus. “I think ours do. And they’re very vocal about it.”

The Bennington approach does not work for every student. “I call this Camp Bennington,” said freshman Phoebe Judge, 18, of Chicago, who plans to transfer to Mt. Holyoke College or Vassar College, where she hopes to find a more challenging and more structured academic environment. “I want a place where I don’t call my professors by their first names,” she said, conceding that the teachers “do know more than the students.”

But for Mary Catherine La Mar, the student who was “literally bursting with ideas” in Coleman’s tutorial, Bennington is the school she has been searching for. “College shouldn’t be a factory,” she said. “People say, ‘Just play the game.’ Well, I don’t want to pay money to play the game. I really want to get an education.”

A couple of years ago, before she knew anything about Bennington, La Mar was enrolled in a political theory course at Columbia University. But she became incensed when the professor distributed a handout that cited key pages of the course readings—ideas the professor clearly wanted included in the final papers.

“I was horrified,” she said. “It was like being a parrot. I felt gypped. I thought, ‘This isn’t learning.’”

Cut to February 2002. La Mar, now a 25-year-old junior at Bennington College, was in Boston for her winter field-work term, desperately trying to figure out how to approach her independent study on magic realism. For weeks, she read everything she could find at the public library about the subject, in an effort to discover what questions interested her the most. The irony—that she was just a stone’s throw away from Harvard, Tufts, MIT, Boston University and Boston College—wasn’t lost on her. “I thought, ‘Right now, there is a class being offered in magic realism,’” she recalled, laughingly describing her frustration.

And while some of those classes may have made her life easier, La Mar doesn’t regret navigating her way through her own process of discovery. Bennington, she is convinced, is the right place for her to do that. “I love it here!” she said. “You’re constantly being asked, ‘What are you really interested in?’”

According to its website, Bennington “does not expect students to conform, but to transform.” Like graduating senior Kati



***Bennington College President Elizabeth Coleman has led the progressive liberal arts college through a controversial, but successful, reorganization.***

Bicknell, 21, who was a blue-haired high school cheerleader in Richford, Vermont before coming to Bennington (where she dyed her hair orange and decided to study video and fashion so she could open a design studio in Chicago), Bennington students do not necessarily want to eschew the mainstream. Much like the school itself, they simply want to interact with the world on their own terms.

“Bennington has to justify itself. It’s not an automatic for anyone,” said Coleman, president since 1987. But without a massive overhaul, she said, Bennington would not have survived—certainly not in a form true to its mission.

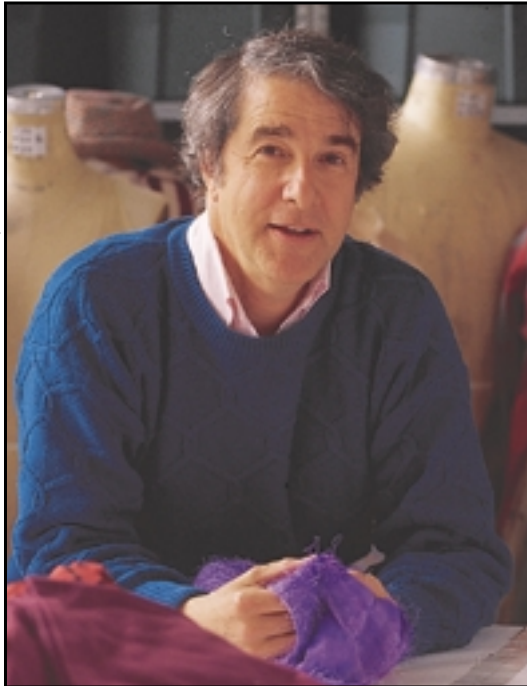
“It was a matter of time before this college would have been in tremendous crisis,” Coleman said, defending the sweeping set of measures she helped enact in 1994. Among those actions was the abrupt firing of 20 teachers whose positions were eliminated, and refusal to renew the contracts of five others. In one fell swoop, Bennington cut its faculty by about a third.

“The last thing I was interested in was this kind of radical surgery,” Coleman said. But Bennington, she said, had “lost its edge” and was no longer able to attract the number and quality of students it needed. Previous attempts to improve the situation with less extreme measures, such as cutting administrative costs and reducing faculty through attrition, had not worked. Eventually, it became clear that more drastic measures were needed. “This college had one serious shot at protecting its values,” Coleman said.

Cutting faculty and eliminating some of their classes (art history, for example, was

***continued next page***

PHOTOS BY GEORGE ROBINSON, BLACK STAR, FOR CROSSTALK



**Costume design instructor and certified mediator Daniel Michaelson teaches a popular Bennington course in community dispute resolution.**

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folded into art classes, to cut costs) was only part of a huge college reorganization. In an effort to get the school back on track, Bennington announced that it would abolish its “presumptive” tenure system (which, pending review, renewed faculty contracts every five years) and instead would offer contracts of varying lengths that may or may not be renewed; replace academic departments with interdisciplinary faculty “program groups”; and return to a practice of hiring only “teacher-practitioners” who were actively engaged in their disciplines.

To ensure that students don’t become too isolated from the world beyond Bennington’s pastoral borders, they have long been required to spend eight weeks each winter working or interning off-campus. After the restructuring, the school also initiated programs designed to increase interaction between Bennington students and the blue-collar community where the college is located.

And in an effort to shed that nagging reputation as the most expensive college in the nation, Bennington promised to cut tuition by ten percent after inflation over the following five years. (The plan worked: With current annual tuition and fees at \$26,540, and room and board another \$6,700, few people would call Bennington a bargain, but last year 68 schools cost even more.)

The ensuing media coverage—which included articles in *The Christian Science Monitor*, *U.S. News & World Report*, and *The New York Times Magazine*, among other national publications—astonished Coleman, who was publicly demonized by some of the dismissed faculty, 19 of whom subsequently sued the school. (The suit finally was settled in December 2000, when Bennington agreed to pay \$1.89 million to the 17 surviving faculty members and to apologize to them. Bennington still denies any wrongdoing; the settlement, said David Rees, Bennington’s director of communications and external relations, merely “seemed expedient.”)

“I don’t know of any time in the history of higher education when any institution has attracted such attention,” Coleman said. “It seems like if something happens at Bennington, it’s sexier than if it happens somewhere else.”

There is a reason for that, said David Warren, president of the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU). “I think Bennington is the case study, writ large, for the struggles of academic politics,” Warren said. “The fundamental question that is posed at Bennington in a more dramatic way than at any other place is: ‘Who governs?’”

For better or worse, Coleman clearly wields a tremendous amount of power. Her critics, generally fired faculty, say she is arrogant and uncompromising, that she runs Bennington like her personal Mom-and-Pop store; her fans, including Bennington’s Board of Trustees President Deborah Wadsworth, consider her a visionary. “Liz has been quite extraordinary in bringing Bennington back from a low point in its history,” said Wadsworth, president of the nonprofit policy research organization Public Agenda. “It’s in very, very good hands.”

Coleman, though, is quick to point out that the school’s restructuring was not a unilateral decision but rather one undertaken with generous input and support from the college’s trustees, and only after a year-long series of public meetings. That made the personal attacks very painful, she said.

Perhaps more painful was the immediate aftermath. In 1995, one year after the restructuring, enrollment sank to a record low 285, and the campus was bitterly divided over whether Coleman was the school’s savior or the anti-Christ.

And the controversy didn’t go away. In the spring of 2000, in response to Bennington’s decision to dismiss several faculty members, including a philosophy teacher who had publicly criticized Coleman and was fired mid-semester, the American Association of University Professors organized a protest. More than 100 supporters marched onto the Bennington campus, where Coleman greeted their leaders with college t-shirts, and students drowned them out with loud music and songs.

Bennington remains on the censure list of the AAUP.

“The college doesn’t have a system of academic due process where the burden is on the administration to show adequacy of cause before terminating a faculty member,” said Robert Kreiser, AAUP associate secretary. “Therefore, from our perspective, the exercise of academic freedom is at risk.”

Not true, responded college spokesman David Rees. The AAUP “is an organization devoted to preserving tenure,” said Rees. That puts it at direct odds with Bennington, which “has never had tenure, has no academic rank, and is devoted to giving every faculty member—regardless of seniority—the maximum possible freedom to teach, create and research what he

or she loves and wants most to explore with students.”

Academic freedom is not at risk, Rees said. Just the opposite, “Bennington’s uncommon pedagogy depends on academic freedom, on collegial governance, on systems of regular, rigorous and honest evalu-

**Once headed toward bankruptcy, Bennington is not only solvent, it is once again in the vanguard of progressive education.**

ations, and on due process.”

Longtime biology teacher Elizabeth Sherman said that even though she herself has been “defrocked” from tenure, she has faith in the current system. “I cannot work just to protect the common denominator,” said Sherman, who serves along with Coleman on the recently revamped Faculty and Performance Review Committee. “Do I wish I had a guarantee that I had an income for life? Yes. But I feel that if I do my job I’ll be rehired.”

Part of the nature of Bennington is that some faculty do come and go. Because the school is so small, those changes are keenly felt. But Rees said that the school is not the revolving door that critics like to portray. This year, he said, the school renewed 19 of 20 contracts that were expiring.

Nor is Coleman as intractable as her critics say, according to Sherman: During a debate this spring over one faculty member’s contract, she said, “minds were changed.”

Another faculty member who asked not be identified scoffed at the allegation that Coleman dismissed teachers because they have publicly criticized her. “A story about your own martyrdom is much more interesting than a story about your professional incompetence,” he said.

The AAUP censure aside, some higher education observers consider the Bennington reorganization a resounding success.

“What once was a very artsy institution with the highest tuition in the country is now an institution pressing the academic envelope about who governs and what it

means to be a progressive institution,” said NAICU President David Warren, adding that he was sometimes “dumbstruck” by what goes on at Bennington.

As the leader of the “poster child” for progressive education, Coleman “represents a kind of radical wishful thinking,” Warren said. “I can name almost no one who has acted with quite the full force and effect that Liz Coleman has.”

Indeed, the numbers look good. Bennington’s on-campus undergraduate enrollment has increased to 537 this past academic year, and is projected to be 585 for the coming school year, just shy of the school’s maximum capacity of 620. That is the highest enrollment since 1990, when it was 570, and twice as high as it was in 1995, the year after the restructuring.

The freshman year attrition rate has declined from 40 percent in 1993 to 12 percent. This year’s graduation rate was 70 percent, much higher than the historical rate of between 50 and 60 percent, said communications director Rees. That has allowed Bennington to increase the faculty, too: from 51 in 1995-’96 to 75 this coming academic year.

College officials say the future appears even brighter. The graduation rate for 2002-’03 is expected to exceed 80 percent. The number of applications is up from about 600 for the 1998-’99 school year to between 750 and 800 for 2002-’03. And more of those applicants are choosing to come to Bennington: last year, 41 percent of the students accepted by Bennington matriculated there, compared to just 28 percent three years ago. More than 75 percent of students receive at least some financial aid from the college.

The quality of those students is also better: Forty-eight percent of last year’s freshmen graduated in the top ten percent of their high school class, and their average combined SAT score was 1,191, up 41 points since 1997.

Students say they have noticed the difference. “Morale has never been higher since I’ve been here,” said graduating senior Rachael Torchia, 22, of Portland, Oregon, who said she hoped to use the photography and mediation skills she learned at Bennington to work with troubled teenagers, which she had already

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**Dance instructor Susan Sgorbati and her students are shown in a dance class. Sgorbati, a Bennington graduate, “can’t imagine teaching anywhere else.”**

# Technological Transformation

## An ambitious national effort to use technology more effectively in large introductory university classes

By Kay Mills

POMONA, CALIFORNIA

**T**HIS IS NOT your father's introductory psychology course. No professor is standing in front of a vast lecture hall, writing concepts like "operant conditioning" or "depression" on the blackboard. No students are nodding off, at least not that anyone can see. They're all sitting at computers, either at home, in their dormitory, or in an on-campus lab.

For the redesigned Psychology 201 class at Cal Poly Pomona, there is a website, a password, lectures streamed online, a CD-ROM for drilling tricky material, a chat room for discussions, e-mail for asking questions, and assignments and exams online. During the last spring quarter, this California State University campus, about 30 miles east of downtown Los Angeles, had one professor teaching the introductory general psychology course online while four others taught in the more traditional lecture method. This fall two professors will conduct large online sections, and next winter quarter students will only be able to take the class online.

Cal Poly Pomona is part of an ambitious national effort to use technology more effectively in large introductory university classes, to improve instruction in what are often deadly dull lecture classes with high dropout rates, and to save money as well.

This redesign project is run by the Center for Academic Transformation, headquartered at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York. Its goals may sound like an oxymoron but they're not, says Carol Twigg, the center's executive director and the moving force behind the project. "Most people in higher education think you improve quality by spending more money." That's not necessarily the



*The goal of "academic transformation" is to "change the way every introductory course in the country is taught," says Carol Twigg, the moving force behind the national project.*

case, Twigg argues, and she clearly thinks this program is proving it.

Supported by an \$8.8 million grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts, Twigg is encouraging academics to think differently about how they use technology. If they just use it to duplicate what they do in lecture halls, she says, they will not save money or teach much more effectively. As part of the Pew Learning and Technology Program, Twigg's center has provided \$200,000 grants to 30 colleges and universities across the country to redesign large classes. The project tests the premises that economies of scale could help the schools save money, and that better use of technology could help students focus better on what they are supposed to learn.

The schools range in size from Fairfield University, a private school in Connecticut with an enrollment of 5,200, to large public campuses like the University of Wisconsin at Madison, the University of Central Florida, and Penn State. Three community colleges also are included.

The redesigned introductory courses include algebra, computer literacy, computer programming, English composition, fine arts, Spanish, astronomy, sociology, American government, psychology, statistics, biology, world literature and chemistry.

Each institution has redesigned one course. But Twigg is convinced that if colleges learn the methodology, they will not need a grant to move on to redesigning other classes—they'll generate their own savings. The goal, she said, "is to move beyond 30 models to change the way every introductory course in the country is taught." If all institutions were to redesign their top 25 courses using the center's methods, she projects an overall reduction in the cost of higher education of about 17 percent. She acknowledges that's "a pretty large goal."

While individual universities or faculty members have redesigned courses using technology in the past, there has been nothing like this project in any coordinated fashion, said Peter Ewell, senior associate at the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems in Boulder, Colorado. In most earlier redesign efforts, instruction has remained teacher-centered rather than learner-centered, he said. With this systematic approach, "you have to fundamentally rethink what's going on." Ewell thinks that is revolutionary.

Writing the grant proposals was part of the rethinking process. Universities interested in the program responded to eight "readiness criteria"—for example, did support for redesigning a course extend to the schools' top levels? Did they have the infrastructure and experience to undertake such a project?

About 150 universities participated in this process for each round; the number was then reduced to 40. Those that made that cut, and another down to 20, attended workshops at which Twigg went over the



PHOTOS BY AXEL KOESTER FOR CROSSTALK

*Karen Brzoska (right), shown with her associate Monica Payton, is an instructional technology designer who has created a CD-ROM that is a key part of a restructured introductory psychology course at Cal Poly Pomona.*

redesign process. "We started with the premise that institutions don't know how to do this. We have to teach them to think differently," she said. The center provided applicants with what Twigg called "aggressive help" in preparing proposals. Rather than having potential grantees guess what the center wanted, the staff told them. That means the schools should be measuring their results with the same yardsticks.

People don't always recognize the innovative potential of technology. For example, when the Pony Express faced the invention of the telegraph, it responded by buying faster horses, then trying to hire better riders, Twigg has written. Or when banks first used automated teller machines, they located them inside their branches, where they were available only during banking hours. Only when the ATMs were placed outside and in grocery stores or airports, available at all hours, did real innovation occur.

It is clear that Twigg also hopes schools will move beyond the idea that there is no significant difference in traditional and online courses and no significant learning difference. She believes that students learn more when they participate actively instead of passively listening to lectures or following online courses without significant interaction. Good instructional software "engages the full range of the human senses through multimedia technology," she has written. "In short, good learningware encourages active learning."

In assessing savings, the center does not include the cost of wiring campuses for computers. "You cannot be a college or university in the 21st century without being a networked campus," Twigg said. That is going on all over, so schools involved do not include that in the calculation of redesign expense. If a school needs to buy some special software for the course, however,

that does count in the cost.

"You reach the savings in terms of people's time," Twigg said. "You might have a situation in which seven people taught the introductory course and now it is handled by four. Those three people can be doing something else. Or if you use adjunct faculty or teaching assistants, you don't need to hire as many."

Jane Wellman, senior associate at the Institute for Higher Education Policy in Washington, D.C., cautions that "tracking the savings is key. If the savings aren't documented—if they're hypothetical or swallowed up by other programs—then they

***As part of the Pew Learning and Technology Program, the Center for Academic Transformation has provided \$200,000 grants to 30 colleges and universities across the country to redesign large classes.***

won't 'count' in the way we account for costs in higher education. So documenting where real cash money is saved and how it's being redirected or reprogrammed is important."

The redesign grants started three years ago, and each grant lasts two years. Each school has faced its own challenges—convincing faculty to get involved, getting them accustomed to the technology, building enough structure into the courses so

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**from preceding page**

that students don't easily fall behind, and dealing with staff departures or illnesses.

At Cal Poly Pomona, 1,800 students each year take Psychology 201 toward their general education requirement. Another 750 would like to take the course but cannot because of classroom space limita-

**While administrators and faculty involved basically are supportive of the online approach, there is still some ambivalence.**

tions. With California facing a \$23.6 billion budget deficit, there obviously will be less money rather than more. The school has been working to redesign this psychology course to accommodate more students.

Changing the course, taken mostly by non-psychology majors, was an evolutionary process. It started in 1995 when Sonia Blackman of the behavioral sciences department had a hip replacement and thus limited mobility. She taught this psychology course to 22 students in the on-campus television studio, broadcasting to two more rooms in which there were 70 to 100 students each.

An artist as well as a professor, Blackman found creative ways to present her topics using illustrations or demonstrations. She decided that if she could do that, the department might use its professors to put together a videotaped course. She convinced some of her colleagues to tape lectures on their specialties, using whatever props they wanted.

"This course came up the ideal way—it emerged from the faculty," said Barbara J. Way, dean of the College of Letters, Arts and Social Sciences. "Sonia convinced some of the faculty it would be a good



**Felicia Friendly Thomas, professor of behavioral sciences, directs the psychology course redesign work at Cal Poly Pomona.**

thing to do."

Originally, students checked the video lessons out of the library. That had built-in restrictions, such as library hours and the number of copies of the videos available. Even though there were multiple copies, some students would keep them too long or everyone would want them the night before an exam. Now the videos are available online.

Blackman and Cal Poly Pomona applied for a redesign grant to develop a CD-ROM as a tutorial for the psychology course, to redo some of the videos, and to shift the course onto WebCT software. Blackman felt the CD was needed because "in any course there are several lessons that are very hard for students to grasp." In general psychology, these include experimental design, classical conditioning, operant conditioning, and depression.

The CD, developed with instructional technology designer Karen Brzoska, begins when a student on a field trip finds a glass jar. He peers into it and a Tinker Bell-like character named Sigmundia beckons him along to help free inhabitants of a "dark world" held captive against their will. While in essence playing an educational video game, students drill on concepts they have been learning through the video lectures and textbook. Some faculty felt that students would not warm up to instruction online or through CDs, but "this generation has demonstrated how addictive computers are," Blackman said.

Carol Twigg agreed. "The problem generally is not the students but some of the faculty," she said. "Luckily, we've found some pioneering faculty who are willing to show the way."

Cal Poly Pomona had hoped to implement the redesigned course fully last fall but illness forced Blackman to retire. The department patched together the instruction for that term. The person who filled in made some changes as she went along and now, the college dean said, those changes have been incorporated.

Felicia Friendly Thomas, professor of behavioral sciences, took over the class during the winter term. She had to learn how to use WebCT, she said, and spent more time on the class than a traditional approach would have required. Now Thomas spends about the same amount of time as before. She doesn't have to lecture because that material is on the video, but the balance of her time is spent monitoring the electronic bulletin boards and answering e-mail about the course content.

Course work is carefully mapped out. The website shows the syllabus, schedule, instructions, assignments, the textbook publisher's related resources that are online, an area in which students can check their own progress, and the class bulletin board. Students have regular assignments that they can do at their own pace—up to a point—but once the deadline has passed, they can't go back into that material.

"Computers crash," Thomas acknowledged, "so there is one writ-

ten assignment each that a student can miss."

Exams are also taken online with Thomas monitoring the test periods. The computer randomly generates questions, and students see one question at a time. If they skip a question, the computer will not let them go back to it. "I tell them I put the most difficult questions at the end, usually those based on the video lessons. They're not in the book. They don't know what's coming" so they can't spend time in the early part of the test looking up answers. This is Thomas's way of trying to "minimize academic dishonesty."

Thomas had 186 students in her spring quarter online class. This fall, she and another professor will handle online sections of the class to accommodate a total of 400 students. Traditional sections will also be offered. But in the winter quarter, the class will be offered only online.

While administrators and faculty involved basically are supportive of the online approach, there is still some ambivalence. "If we could check these students ten years from now," Thomas said, "I'd like to ask how much of [the course content] did they keep? Do they view it as a canned class that they took and got a good grade and moved on? Was there something about a face-to-face class that increased the probability that a student would take life lessons from it? I don't know the answer to that question.

"If it is less personal, do you personalize less?"

Even though Cal Poly Pomona wants to put more Psychology 201 students online, Dean Way thinks that her college will have to continue offering some traditional sections. "Digitally delivered classes don't work for everybody, so we have to identify the largest populations where it is good," Way said. Those groups might include working people, young mothers with children at home, more mature students, she added.

Using the CD-ROM tutorials and computer-based testing should allow the university to reduce faculty hours significantly and replace them with less expensive teaching assistant hours. As a result, the university had said in the early days of the project, the cost per student would drop from \$152 to \$21, a reduction of 86 percent.

But Way says the school probably hasn't saved any money yet. There are "incredible amounts of time invested up front. An administrator like myself has to recognize that faculty can't do this and maintain their workload, at least initially. You just burn them out." In the development phase, she said she "tried to be generous to give faculty time to work on this. You can't anticipate what will go wrong technologically. Once we've got that under control, one professor can take up to 200-250 students," with teaching assistants to help supervise.

Twenty-five miles east of Pomona, on the Moreno Valley campus of Riverside Community College, the highest-enrollment math class on campus is being redesigned. Some 3,600 students each year take elementary algebra, the lowest-level math class that fulfills the general educa-



**Dean Barbara J. Way of Cal Poly Pomona supports the restructured psychology class, saying "it came up the ideal way—it emerged from the faculty."**

tion requirement. The traditional lecture format had minimal student interaction with faculty and didn't account for students' different learning styles and widely varied backgrounds.

Riverside cut the lecture time in half because, as Sheila Pisa, associate professor of math explained, faculty members were spending 15 to 30 minutes of each class answering homework questions. The redesign project shifted those homework assignments to an interactive software program that generated individualized assessments, study plans and learning sets. A math lab was established where students receive help from faculty or tutors and where they do their assignments online.

One lesson learned from the redesign process, Pisa said, is to match the technology to the course. Once the pilot project was underway, the faculty discovered that the software didn't go along with the textbook. Students like to see the material presented in the same way and so they were sometimes confused, Pisa explained. So this fall the course will use a different textbook and software called "My Math Lab" that comes with it.

Riverside calculated that it saved about \$140,000 in wages with the redesign—almost exactly the amount it cost to set up the math lab that the school had needed anyway. That lab will generate even more savings because students from other courses use it, too. The redesign process also prodded the faculty to agree on a level of standardization for this course, which Pisa said professors had been talking about for some time.

Other schools among the 30 pilot projects report these results:

- Rio Salado, part of the Maricopa Community College District headquartered in Tempe, Arizona, intended to redesign the delivery of its introductory algebra course. It wanted one instructor to handle 100 students while devoting more time to content instead of troubleshooting technology problems and performing course clerical work.

But because Rio Salado begins each of its distance learning classes every two weeks, it proved too difficult to enroll 100 students in any one section. Instead, the college redesigned its course man-

agement system so that one instructor handled four different math courses with a total of 100 students.

The redesign added a course assistant to work on the technology questions, monitor student progress and alert the instructor when students were having difficulty with the material. The instructor could therefore spend more time on content.

- Virginia Tech, in Blacksburg, Virginia, redesigned its linear algebra course, which is taken by about 2,000 first-year engineering, physical sciences and math students. The redesign was part of a larger transformation project for all large-enrollment math courses made possible by the opening of the Math Emporium, a 500-workstation computer lab and learning center.

Lecture sections for the redesigned course were eliminated and all the classwork is conducted in the Math Emporium, which is open every day. Content was organized into units that a student would normally cover at a rate of two a week, followed by a quiz. Interactive tutorials give the student feedback.

The Math Emporium employs student tutors, who point students toward appropriate resources for answering their questions. Last fall the shift in format allowed one professor to handle 1,500 students and helped the university save more than \$130,000, said math professor Ken Hannsgen.

"This is just a first shot," Hannsgen said. "When you consider that traditional methods have had decades or even

centuries to perfect themselves, I think we've made a good beginning. You should encourage people to be creative—maybe you can do more than you expect." There were a lot of doubters, he added. "But you should not listen to the worst fears."

A major lesson from the redesign process, said Carol Twigg, is that "the more you individualize the learning process for students, the better the results are. Virginia Tech is a good example of this. They have gone to the level of what each student is ready to learn and what problems each has" and have structured their course around that. "The more you do this, the more successful you will be."

Math and other quantitative courses appear the most likely candidates for using technology to increase quality and decrease costs. But some schools are redesigning world literature, the performing arts, and English composition:

- Brigham Young University is reducing the amount of time students spend in the classroom and replacing it with interactive multimedia lessons for its first-year writing course. The technology also helps the university standardize a course that has had a wide range of quality because of different experience levels within the faculty.

- The University of Southern Mississippi is testing an online section of its world literature course in which faculty presentations of the content are taped and placed online along with instructors' notes, additional media resources, quizzes, exams and essay assignments. Students can attend the live presenta-

tions but the school reports that only a handful do—sometimes none at all.

Change, reform, revolution—whatever one calls it—is never easy in any field. "Universities are going to push back a good deal more" when redesign efforts go beyond pilot projects, said Peter Ewell of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. He sees three questions to be addressed:

- How far-reaching can redesign be?

"It's no coincidence that most of the redesign projects are in math and science," Ewell said. "In those fields you have a faculty that can agree on the outcomes it wants." It is harder to convince faculties in the humanities and social sciences to do this because "that means giving up 'my god-given right to do what I want to do.'"

- How do you deal with credit hours and registration? How do you account for faculty teaching load? How do you alter, in Ewell's words, the "administrivia" of academic life with these redesigns?

- And perhaps most fundamental: What do you do with the savings? Right now, many schools are selling the redesign process to faculty who want to be freed to do their own research or teach upper-level courses. "But that's just feeding the higher education habit," Ewell said. If you implement these redesigns big-time, he asked, shouldn't you be putting a lot of that money back into lower-division courses? And if you enlarge the redesign process, isn't it likely that colleges and universities will need fewer core faculty in the future?

To spread the word about the redesign process, the Center for Academic Transformation encourages participating schools to disseminate their findings on their own campuses and at conferences. For example, Fairfield University, which redesigned its two-semester general biology course with a Pew grant, hosted a conference this summer. Conferees discussed what worked and what didn't, how redesign results can be assessed, and how more faculty members

***At the Moreno Valley campus of Riverside Community College, the highest-enrollment math class on campus is being redesigned.***

can be brought on board. The center also maintains a website ([www.center.rpi.edu](http://www.center.rpi.edu)) containing extensive detail about each college's effort.

"I've been talking about these ideas for a long time," Twigg said. "I think we've proved that you can do this. Now the question is how do you disseminate these ideas more rapidly through higher education so that people who hear about the process won't start from scratch. We let these 30 schools experiment, within certain parameters. Now we know what works." ♦

*Former Los Angeles Times editorial writer Kay Mills is the author of four books, including one on the federal Head Start program.*

GEORGE ROBINSON, BLACK STAR, FOR CROSSTALK



***Graduating senior Kati Bicknell studied video and fashion at Bennington and hopes to open a design studio in Chicago.***

## **BENNINGTON** from page 4

begun to do during her senior year. "I think people genuinely love it here."

"Students are coming here because it's their choice—their first choice," said junior Emily Keegin, 21, of Sausalito, California. Keegin didn't even apply anywhere else, and she now works part-time in the admis-

sions office, exchanging e-mails with prospective students wanting to know about everything from contra dancing to dormitory bathtubs. "We're told to be completely honest," she said; that way, applicants can "self-select," which helps reduce the attrition rate.

The school also has dramatically improved its financial situation. It no longer has an operating deficit, and has raised an unprecedented \$47 million since the restructuring. Initially, most of the support came from foundations, but \$38.5 million has come from alumni and individuals, far more than they had ever contributed before, said Sherri Mylott, Bennington's vice president for development. "The alumni are very happy," she said. "I constantly hear, 'We feel the energy, we see it in the publications, we feel it on the campus—it's real.'"

Students agree. They're aware of the controversy over the restructuring, but for the most part, they said, it's ancient history. "It's becoming a lot more comfortable to joke about it," said student government president Kamal Shaikh, 24, a graduating senior from Karachi, Pakistan, who said he had tremendous respect for President Coleman. The big issues on campus these days are class scheduling and student input—hardly revolutionary topics.

Students acknowledged that it was sometimes painful to see Bennington dismissing teachers they were fond of. And

they expressed some misgivings about the way those teachers are treated. But they also felt confident that, on balance, the system worked in their favor.

"I think it's better to lose good teachers than to only have mediocre teachers," said graduating senior Melody Zilber, 21, of Allentown, Pennsylvania, a painter who considers Bennington nothing short of "utopia." Like many of her classmates, Zilber spent the bulk of her college career at Bennington's Visual and Performing Arts Center, or VAPA, which functions as the heart of the school. Whereas many college students rally around intercollegiate sports teams, which Bennington doesn't have, Bennington students rally around their work—and much of that work goes on in the darkrooms, theaters and art studios of VAPA.

Faculty members, as well as students, are encouraged to collaborate and experiment. After longtime dance instructor Susan Sgorbati and costume design instructor Daniel Michaelson became certified mediators, they developed a course in mediation. The popular class attracts about 25 students each year, and advanced students assist professional mediators in local courts. Building on that success, Sgorbati and Michaelson founded Quantum Leap, an outreach program that allows Bennington students to work with local at-risk high school students.

Her professional progression isn't as illogical as it might seem, said Sgorbati: Like dance improvisation, mediation is

about making order out of chaos. What is unusual, she said, is that Bennington allowed her to pursue it. "To switch fields like that in academia is not a common practice," noted Sgorbati, a Bennington graduate who said she "can't imagine teaching anywhere else."

Bennington even gets high marks from painter and performance poet Carol Diehl, though she was shocked—and disappointed—that her teaching contract wasn't renewed this spring, after four years. "I'm a big supporter of Bennington," said Diehl, who loved the flexibility to design her painting courses to fit her philosophy. She plans to write a book about the process and teaching of art. Faculty aren't treated fairly, she said, but added, "I am absolutely one hundred percent grateful for my experience."

So, too, are most of the students. "The only thing the school wants from you is for you to tell them what you want from life," said Summer Zandrew, who graduated in 2000. Now living in Chicago, Zandrew, 27, credits Bennington with giving her the confidence to pursue her painting; already, she has sold almost a dozen pieces.

"The actual information they gave me was nothing. The information they inspired me to get for myself was amazing," said Zandrew. "Bennington kind of takes away all the fear." ♦

*Kathy Witkowsky is a freelance reporter in Missoula, Montana, and a frequent contributor to National Public Radio.*

## GRADE INFLATION

from page 1

Even as evidence of grade inflation has been piling up across the country, few schools seem to be willing to confront it.

Yet grade inflation—or, more accurately, grade compression—can't go on forever. "Unlike price inflation, where dollar values can, at least in theory, rise indefinitely, the upper boundary of grade inflation is constrained by not being able to rise above an A or a 100," said a damning report about the problem, which was authored by Hen-

**Last year a report showed that the proportion of straight-A students has quadrupled in the last three decades.**

ry Rosovsky, a former Harvard dean, for the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. "The consequence is grade 'compression' at the upper end."

That is precisely what was happening at Harvard. In 1950, just over 15 percent of Harvard students got a B-plus or better. That has since increased to nearly 70 percent. Fifty percent of the grades at Harvard are now A's or A-minuses, up from 22 percent in 1966. The number of C's fell from ten percent to barely five percent, while only one percent of grades are D's or F's. And since Harvard's system has essentially guaranteed honors to any student who received at least a B average, a record 91 percent of seniors last year graduated with honors. *Cum laude*, a distinction that requires at least a B-minus, was even easier to get.

Under the glare of national publicity

after these figures were made public by a series of stories in the *Boston Globe*, the Harvard faculty agreed in May to award more B's to students, and to raise the academic requirements for honors. Starting with the class entering this fall, the university will cap the number of students receiving *summa, magna* and *cum laude*, and no more than 60 percent of seniors will be eligible.

The number of students graduating *cum laude* will be limited to 30 percent, *summa* and *magna cum laude* combined will be no more than 20 percent. Harvard's old 15-point grading scale, under which a B-plus was worth 12 and an A-minus 14—encouraging more A-minuses—was jettisoned in favor of the 4.0 scale in use at almost every other school. Grading patterns outside the norm will trigger an investigation by the department chair.

As dramatic as these changes are, at a macro level they represent something more important: an admission by the nation's foremost university that grade inflation has run rampant. Very few other schools have been willing to make such a concession. Columbia University is one that has. Its Committee on Instruction acknowledged that half of all undergraduates annually were being named to the dean's list, making it "a dubious honor indeed," as Dean of Academic Affairs Kathryn Yatrakis put it. Yet resistance from the student council managed to forestall a proposed increase in the qualifying GPA for two years, until the university agreed to add a footnote to transcripts explaining the change. Beginning this fall, the minimum GPA to make the dean's list finally will rise from 3.3 to 3.6.

Grade inflation "appears to have been especially noticeable" in the Ivy League, the Rosovsky report says. Fifty-one percent of students at Yale are awarded honors, 44 percent at Princeton, 40 percent at Dartmouth, and 42 percent at Brown.

About 43 percent of all grades awarded at Princeton and 44 percent at Dartmouth are A's; that's up from 31 percent in 1973 at Princeton, where only 12 percent of grades are now lower than a B.

Yale says it has no grade inflation (though it will not release detailed information on grades), but has imposed a 30 percent cap on the number of graduating seniors who can receive honors, out of concern that the numbers were growing too high. One student who used a fake transcript to get into Yale earned a B average in the two years before he was caught and thrown out, according to his lawyer—better than he had done at the community college he had attended before.

Denials are common in response to allegations of grade inflation. Northwestern University Provost Lawrence Dumas, for example, told the Chicago Tribune that there was no grade inflation at his campus, only to be confronted with the fact that A's and A-minuses comprised 46 percent of all awarded grades, up

from 35 percent a decade earlier. Barely one of every six grades at Northwestern is lower than a B.

Dumas began an investigation, but one critic on the faculty, Professor Robert McClory, expects little action. "I don't think anything will happen until a bunch of universities get together and decide a C is not a disreputable grade," McClory said. "One professor can't do very much about it."

Some professors, in fact, do not want to see a change. "I would say that there's not a great deal of interest on the faculty about the situation," McClory said. "Many faculty have sort of bought into the belief that students are paying so much for tuition that they have a right to a good grade. They won't tell you that, but that's the implication, as if the cost has anything to do with it."

Former Harvard undergraduate education dean Susan Pedersen cited faculty fears of being labeled "tough graders" as a contributing factor to the grade inflation there. When he was at Duke, statistician Johnson showed that grades had an effect on increasingly important course evaluations, encouraging faculty to be lenient. "It's clearly in a faculty member's interest to assign grades that are higher than average because they'll receive higher class evaluations from their students," he said.

In a study of course evaluations and enrollment patterns, Johnson found that students expecting an A-minus in a class were 20 to 30 percent more likely to give a favorable review of a professor than students expecting a B. After the course was over, those who did not get the grade they had anticipated lowered their evaluations, while those with higher marks gave more favorable ratings.

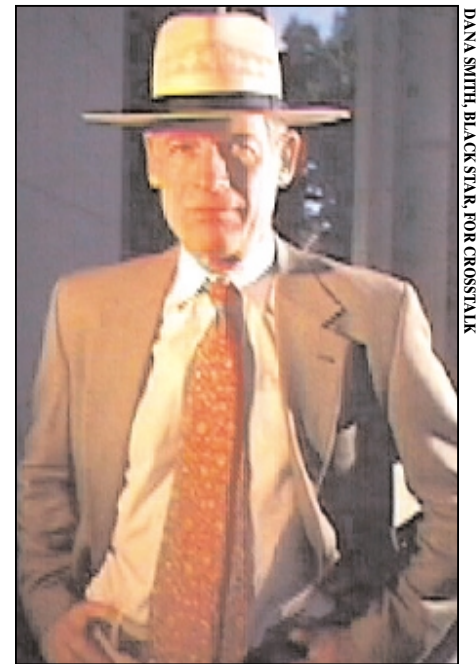
Meanwhile, in choosing between two different instructors of the same course, students were twice as likely to choose the one who traditionally gave higher grades. Tough graders not only receive fewer favorable evaluations, Johnson found; they attract fewer students, which means they may be less likely to be rewarded with tenure, promotions or raises.

The study also confirmed that natural science and math professors give the lowest grades, humanities the highest. (Harvard also found this; in its report to faculty, it disclosed that humanities professors were the least stringent graders, effectively giving only A's and B's, while faculty in economics, political science and social science commonly gave B-pluses, and in the natural sciences more C's and D's.)

Johnson proposed that A's awarded by professors at Duke who only gave A's should count less than A's from professors who also imposed B's and C's. The idea was rejected by the faculty. Forty-five percent of Duke undergraduate grades at the time were A's or A-minuses.

"It was very contentious," Johnson said. "All the humanities were against it, the sciences were for, the social sciences were split. There's so much polarization now at Duke between the humanities faculty and science faculty that it's unlikely there will be any reform there."

Faculty fear of negative evaluations, and the mentality that students who pay increasing amounts of tuition are entitled



Harvard professor Harvey Mansfield gives each student the grade he earned and reports a second, higher grade to the university registrar.

to good grades are only two reasons cited for escalating GPAs. But both threaten to make things worse, as costs continue to rise and an increasing proportion of faculty become part-time and untenured, rather than full-time, making them even more dependent on evaluations by their students.

"Their position is vulnerable from below in the form of student pressure, and from above in the form of the displeasure of administrators," the Rosovsky report says. "This situation is likely to lead to more tolerant grading, a tendency that is exacerbated by high workloads that make it impractical to engage in careful student evaluation."

Nor are presidents and provosts inclined to crack down on high grades, especially at public universities, where funding is increasingly based on enrollment, and legislators and trustees want higher retention rates. "Everyone is concerned with two things: They're concerned with quality and they're concerned with retention. And unfortunately those two things are in conflict with each other," said Peter Lawler, professor of government at Berry College in Mount Berry, Georgia. "So administrators say grade inflation is a problem, but they don't do anything about it."

The Rosovsky study offers other reasons grades are going up, beginning with the student activism of the Vietnam era, when faculty were reluctant to give poor grades to male students who might be drafted into military service if they dropped out of school. "When grading time came, and we knew that giving a C meant that our student (who deserved a D) would go into the jungle, we did one better and gave him a B," one unnamed professor is quoted as admitting. (That situation is repeating itself in states like Georgia, where students are threatened with losing their state HOPE scholarships if their GPAs fall below a certain level.)

Meanwhile, distribution requirements were loosened, allowing students to elect courses that are less demanding, and to drop courses more easily if they are on the brink of getting a bad grade.

KRIS SNIBBE/HARVARD UNIVERSITY NEWS OFFICE



A report written by Henry Rosovsky, a former Harvard dean, found that grade inflation was "especially noticeable" at Ivy League universities.

DANA SMITH, BLACK STAR FOR CROSSTALK

Grade inflation began to be documented as early as the 1970s, when Michigan State University researcher Arvo Juola found that the average GPA had increased nearly half a letter grade between 1960 and 1974, with the greatest increases coming between 1968 and 1972. Grade inflation accelerated again from 1985 to 1995. By the mid-'90s the average grade had drifted from a C to somewhere between a B and a B-minus. Nationally, 26 percent of grades are now A's, up from 7 percent in 1970, and only 10 to 20 percent are C's.

Then there is the self-esteem issue. "Some professors hold the view that low grades discourage students and frustrate their progress," the Rosovsky report says. "Some contend it is defensible to give a student a higher grade than he or she deserves in order to motivate those who are anxious or poorly prepared by their earlier secondary school experiences."

Some critics of grades, the report says, argue that they are punitive and harsh. "That's like saying somebody has cancer, but let's not tell him, because it will hurt his self-esteem," responded McClory, of Northwestern. "The damage is fairly obvious: People are not being told how good or how poor they are." He added sarcastically: "Everybody's better than average. They're not getting an honest report of their strengths and weaknesses. They're being told they're all great. People are going out with unrealistic perception of their own talents. You'll never get better if no one ever hurts your feelings."

That's the belief of Harvard government professor Harvey Mansfield, who gives students in his course on modern political philosophy two grades: the one they earned, and a second, higher grade that he reports to the university registrar. A quarter of the students received A's, and none got C's, while under the deflated marks, ten percent got A's or A-minuses and 25 percent got C's or lower.

Not everyone believes that grade inflation is as widespread or dramatic as suggested. Harvard points out that its entering students, according to their SAT and achievement test scores, are better every year, and that many work much harder while in college because graduate school admission has become considerably more competitive.

In British universities, where the proportion of students graduating with a first or upper-second degree has increased from around a third to half since 1988, a study by two economists attributed the rise to a general improvement in the quality of students as measured by A-level results, and a significant increase in the enrollment of women, who they concluded are awarded higher grades. (Men, the researchers said, also tend to choose tougher academic subjects.)

The U.S. Department of Education concluded in 1995 that average grades at U.S. universities and colleges had actually declined between 1972 and 1993. An Education Department study released this summer found that while about 15 percent of students got mostly A's, more than a third received C's or lower. The study included students at community colleges—nearly 40 percent of whom got C's and D's

or worse—and private, for-profit universities, but some higher education associations seized on the results as proof that grade inflation is exaggerated.

A preponderance of evidence suggests the opposite. While GPAs were steadily rising over the last 30 years, SAT scores actually declined. One-third of all college and university students require remedial education, and about 40 percent of schools report that this number is on the increase. A study by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA found that only 25 percent of faculty felt that their students were academically well prepared. And in the annual survey of incoming freshmen nationwide conducted by UCLA, only a third reported studying six or more hours a week in high school, an all-time low.

Despite this, A's and B's now account for 80 percent of all grades awarded at the University of Illinois, up from 63 percent in 1967. At Cornell, the proportion of A's has more than doubled in the last three decades, even though "most faculty would be hard pressed to argue that today's Cornell students are demonstrably better than Cornell students in the past," as vice provost Isaac Kramnick told the campus newspaper.

A draft of a report by a committee at Georgetown University said professors there shower A's on students for what is "simply good work....We do not set high enough academic standards for our students and as a result, they are not achieving their full academic potential." Even the University of Chicago, famous for its no-nonsense approach to academics, has seen an increase in GPAs in lower-level courses from 2.5 to 3.26 since 1964.

The consequences? Among other things, a shift in enrollment from the hard-grading natural sciences and mathematics to the more lenient humanities. At Duke, Johnson attributed a 50 percent decrease in the number of students in natural science and social science classes to the disparity in grading. A separate Williams College study found that students chose electives, in part, based on grading patterns. "It allows students to exercise control over their workloads and their

***In 1950, just over 15 percent of Harvard students got a B-plus or better. That has since increased to nearly 70 percent.***

GPAs by the way they choose classes," Johnson said. "When they're looking for an elective, they will look for classes with lower workloads. So they end up learning less."

McClory is concerned about the integrity of universities and colleges, which he says hypocritically ignore grade inflation even as they decry academic dishonesty. "There is a certain phoniness that's going on," he said. "We talk about plagiarism, fabrication, and then everybody goes along with this crazy grading system. We're



**Robert Sowell, dean of the graduate school at North Carolina State, says most graduate schools try to evaluate applicants on many grounds besides grades and test scores.**

teaching by example a kind of dishonesty."

Some schools would rather switch than fight, however. The Washington University School of Law purposely inflated the median score of its graduating students from 83 to 87 on a scale of 100, to bring it closer to its peer institutions, whose graduates it feared were at an unfair advantage in the job market. "There was a problem for our students in that a lot of comparable schools tend to give higher grades than we do," law professor Richard Kuhns said. "But I think it would have been very easy for us, without having changed the grading system at all, to send out a little note that made a brief comparison of our schools' grades to other schools' grades to show how our students did." The University of Virginia School of Law also increased the mean grade in every course, from a B to a B-plus.

"Every Harvard causes grade inflation everywhere, because there's obviously not a nationwide grading scale, so everyone assumes that a B-plus from Harvard is better than a B-plus at Berry, where I teach," Peter Lawler said. "Now that the GPA at Harvard is a 3.5, how can the average Berry student possibly compete in the world of work? So Harvard really compels everyone else to suffer grade inflation."

Many institutions also say deflating grades will hurt their undergraduates, not only in the job market, but in the competition for admission into graduate schools. Not so, says Robert Sowell, dean of the graduate school at North Carolina State University. Admissions committees "really are trying to evaluate on the total credential—not just the grade point average, but also the standardized test scores, the references, statements from the students about career objectives, portfolios for special concentrations, that sort of thing."

In addition to Columbia and Harvard, a few schools have taken steps to curb their escalating GPAs. They have had varying success. In 1994, in response to an increase in students' GPAs, Dartmouth began to list the median grade for each class next to the student's own grade on transcripts, a move that was meant to encourage a broader distribution of grades. In fact, grades have

continued to inch up, and students are now pressing for the median grades to be removed from transcripts. (Columbia's transcripts also list a student's grade along with the percentage of the class that earned the same grade.)

Eastern Kentucky University issues semester reports on grade distribution to show how students fared against their peers. Bryn Mawr, Georgetown and a handful of other schools publicize the average grades awarded by each department to nudge the more lenient toward a stricter grading policy.

Stanford, which dropped the F in 1970, has restored it. The University of Pennsylvania limited the number of students who could receive an A in an introductory economics course to one-third of the class, and required that another third receive a C or lower. The change resulted in intense competition among students, who refused to share notes or help their classmates.

The American Academy of Arts and Sciences report recommends that all faculty be told how their grading standards compare to those of their colleagues, something that is already done at Harvard, Duke and some other schools. It also speaks approvingly of providing broader grading data on the student transcript, and establishing a grading curve in larger classes. A follow-up study is planned.

One Lehigh University professor has taken matters into his own hands. He offered an annual cash award to the colleague who received positive course evaluations even while giving tough grades. The rest of the faculty resoundingly turned him down.

Until more than a few professors, or more than a handful of schools, resolve to end the practice, says Michigan's Valen Johnson, grade inflation is unlikely to stop. "Any institution that adopts reform on its own puts its own students at risk," he said. "So it's going to be difficult for an institution to take the path by themselves." ♦

*Jon Marcus is executive editor of Boston Magazine, and also covers U.S. higher education for the Times of London.*

# OTHER VOICES



## Facing New Challenges

### The higher education community must take the lead in addressing the dramatic pace of external change

By Roberts T. Jones

**F**ORMER GENERAL ELECTRIC CEO Jack Welch once leveled a sobering warning at businesses that fail to adapt to external change: “If the rate of change outside your organization exceeds the rate of change inside your organization,” he said, “then the end is in sight.” Now more than ever, his words apply equally well to U.S. colleges and universities. Though Americans have long enjoyed the world’s best system of higher education, that system faces unprecedented new challenges as it confronts the dramatically changing expectations of the world around it. Its continued strength and reputation depend on its ability to meet these changes head-on.

The business community is often the first to experience these changes. As it strives to succeed in an accelerating information-based economy, business is keenly aware of escalating global competition and technological innovation, as well as of the accompanying demand for new knowledge and skills. Business has also begun to observe social and economic developments that will affect higher education’s capacity to respond to this demand—developments including changing demographics and the trend towards a more client-centered system of education. The combined force of these changes will have far-reaching implications for the business community and American higher education.

#### Global competition

As the global shift from a manufacturing to a knowledge economy continues to level the international economic playing field, those nations with the best-educated citizenry will enjoy a decisive competitive advantage. Countries across the globe are making rapid gains in educational and technological attainment, improving their productivity and thereby increasingly challenging U.S. economic strength.

Norway, Britain and the Netherlands have recently surpassed the United States in the proportions of their populations graduating from college, and other countries are quickly closing in on U.S. levels of educational attainment. While American postsecondary enrollments grew at an average annual rate of 1.1 percent between 1980 and 1997, for example, Chinese and Indonesian annual enrollment growth reached 15.6 percent and 19.1 percent, respectively. At these rates, enrollment levels in such countries may well exceed American levels within decades.

**The number of college graduates in high-demand areas such as engineering and science is increasing far more quickly abroad than in the United States.**

The gross domestic product of these countries is growing accordingly. At 5.8 percent and 11.1 percent respectively, China’s and Indonesia’s annual GDP growth between 1990 and 1998 far outpaced the American annual growth of 2.9 percent over the same period. As more and more countries develop their educational capabilities, moreover, this trend towards international parity—and stiffer global competition—will persist long into the future.

In this new world, market share is moving to countries most able to deliver skilled workers, particularly in the areas of science and technology.

The business community has ample cause for alarm when it observes the number of college graduates in high-demand areas such as engineering and science increasing far more quickly abroad than in the United States. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, only 5 percent of all degrees awarded in the U.S. are in engineering, compared to 21 percent of German degrees and 46 percent of Chinese degrees.

Together with the rise of global competition, the rapid advance of technological innovation is incessantly transforming the definition of jobs, and the skills these jobs require. More importantly, the very nature of these skills is evolving continuously, requiring more and more Americans to seek further education and training throughout their lives.

#### Client-centered education

By 2011, more than 75 percent of Americans will engage in postsecondary study within two years of graduating from high school. As enrollments grow larger and far more diverse

than ever, colleges and universities must accommodate not only more students, but a greater variety of student needs. Because increasing numbers of low-income students, academically under-prepared students, part-time students, and continuing education students require ready access to higher levels of education and training, traditional models of financing and delivering higher education are coming under mounting pressure.

Faced with this unprecedented volume and diversity of students seeking new skills, the higher education system is already becoming defined by consumer choice. As individuals and companies search for more “user-friendly” education and training options, they are exercising far greater control over what students learn, as well as where, when, and how they learn it. This new emphasis on client needs will only build momentum, radically challenging longstanding notions of institutional structure and educational delivery.

In light of these new conditions, colleges and universities can no longer rely on the traditional institutional practices or structures that have served them so well in the past.

Because the quality and availability of postsecondary education will grow increasingly vital to the nation’s social and economic health, American colleges and universities have entered an era of great opportunity, tremendous responsibility and significant risk. To preserve the traditional values of liberal education while fulfilling this responsibility, the higher education community must take the lead in addressing the dramatic pace of external change.

The scope and speed of this change raises educational issues of great concern to the business community. Faced with daunting external challenges, higher education has an obligation to become more responsive to rising demands for certain types of degrees; more inclusive at a time when all students must attain higher levels of academic proficiency; more user-friendly to accommodate the rising importance of lifelong learning; and more capable of communicating student competencies at a time when shifting skill demands have diminished the reliability of institutional prestige. In addition, the time has come to fashion a funding mechanism adequate to an age when all people will have to return to the postsecondary system repeatedly throughout their lives.

We face a growing mismatch between external skill demands and the degrees colleges and universities currently award. While jobs requiring technical degrees are projected to increase by more than 50 percent over the next decade—more than four times as fast as the overall increase in jobs projected for the same period—the number of Americans earning degrees in corresponding fields has been declining sharply over the past 15 years.

Between 1987 and 1998, the number of engineering degrees dropped by 19 percent; that of mathematics degrees fell 25 percent; most surprisingly, the number of computer science degrees declined by a staggering 32 percent. While colleges and universities certainly do not bear the sole responsibility for this mismatch, they do need to take more aggressive measures to respond.

Most importantly, their means of addressing external requirements must anticipate the inevitability of change. As knowledge and skill demands continue to evolve, current measures to address degree shortages will likely become inadequate to future needs. Such unavoidable changes will challenge colleges and universities to continually develop innovative ways of responding to these demands. They might use financial or academic incentives to encourage participation in certain degree programs, or work with the elementary and secondary system to improve the academic preparation of all students to study in high-demand fields.

The academy’s long-standing emphasis on identifying and promoting the very best students directly conflicts with the growing moral and economic imperative to maximize the academic achievement of all students. Even the most rigorous programs and courses will be judged less by the numbers of students they “weed out” than by their ability to educate the greatest number to the highest standards.

The current academic “culture of exclusion” often exacerbates skills shortages in areas of particularly high demand. In science and engineering programs, for example, student attrition rates typically stand at 50 percent or higher. University policies and practices frequently contribute to these high levels of attrition. Some departments set quotas that prescribe high failure rates, for example, and many reward top-tier professors with small groups of elite students.

Such departments are facing growing pressure to demonstrate their ability to promote high academic achievement in all students, including those who lack proficiency upon enrollment.

This will admittedly be a daunting task, especially at a time when so many high school graduates are under-prepared for the rigors of college study. The American system of higher education therefore will have to assume a central role in improving elementary and secondary education by strengthening teacher preparation programs while helping to set appropriate standards for high school graduation.

#### Increasingly diverse educational needs

The demand for more “user-friendly” colleges and universities is challenging traditional structures of postsecondary education. A “one-size-fits-all” approach to higher education cannot survive in an era of increasingly diverse educational needs.

**Because postsecondary education will grow increasingly vital to the nation’s social and economic health, American colleges and universities have entered an era of great opportunity, tremendous responsibility and significant risk.**

Driven in large part by an increasingly dynamic labor market, student demand for frequent and varied lifelong learning opportunities does not respect institutional or curricular boundaries. In the course of their careers, Americans will move between jobs, technical schools, two-year colleges, and four-year colleges, often assembling disparate courses and learning experiences into recognized credentials.

This trend is compelling the higher education community to forge more articulation agreements between institutions long separated by different missions and institutional identities.

**By 2011, more than 75 percent of Americans will engage in postsecondary study within two years of graduating from high school.**

In doing so, higher education must acknowledge the rising importance of community colleges in accommodating students with a wide range of educational and professional backgrounds.

Distinctions between different degrees or even different institutions will continue to blur as e-learning technologies enable learners to shop for courses without regard to geographical or institutional borders. Because new e-learning technologies encourage self-paced learning, moreover, fixed requirements for classroom hours will no longer dictate how long it takes to finish a course or earn a credential. Long-accepted assumptions

about the two-year associate's degree or the four-year bachelor's will yield to time frames that more closely suit both student learning needs and fast-paced labor market demands.

The demand for such flexible "user-friendly" learning opportunities has already encouraged for-profit competitors to enter the postsecondary market, and these proprietary schools often respond more quickly to new professional skill demands than do not-for-profit institutions. As their long-held regional monopolies succumb to the spread of distance learning technologies, some more traditional institutions are being forced to address the competitive pressures of a far more client-centered post-secondary education system.

In a competitive environment, convenience and quality are not mutually exclusive. Client demand for demonstrable learning results is becoming every bit as strong as the demand for user-friendly education. Postsecondary providers that do not combine quality and convenience risk succumbing to their competitors.

### Demonstrable learning results

Demonstrated competencies are becoming more important than degrees or the institutions that confer them. In and of themselves, degrees seldom signify competencies in any reliable way. Unless accompanied by a clear and widely-recognized statement of competencies, a postsecondary credential offers employers little evidence that its bearer can satisfy the requirements of productive work in a fast-evolving world.

The half-life of an institution's or degree's reputation will in fact only become shorter as changes in skill requirements accelerate, and so the need to prove actual competency is assuming unprecedented importance.

Rather than reflecting any desire for institutional accountability, the necessity of measuring outcomes arises out of the need to meet the conditions of a dynamic labor market. Indeed, a growing desire to emphasize student learning over institutional performance is fueling a spreading interest in "learning portfolios" that can document the competencies an individual has gained from multiple sources over the course of a lifetime.

Of course, colleges and universities cannot productively measure outcomes until they identify precisely what they should measure. It is as a result becoming increasingly important to determine what essential competencies all college students should possess. As new information continues to permeate every aspect of modern experience, the knowledge and skills required for success in both the job market and day-to-day life have begun to intersect. Regardless of their particular career trajectories, therefore, everyone will have to master a core of knowledge and skills which equips them for both immediate labor market requirements and the unavoidable necessity of lifelong learning.

Current financing systems are proving increasingly inadequate to support the growing demand for postsecondary education and training. The current maze of scattered loans, grants and tax incentives simply cannot support the educational needs of a society in which everyone will frequently move in and out of higher education over the course of his or her life. Originally designed for full-time students earning four-year degrees in bricks-and-mortar facilities, today's financial aid systems do not serve the growing majority of postsecondary students who do not fit that profile because they follow alternative trajectories towards a degree, or receive their education through alternative delivery systems.

The goal of universal access to higher education depends on a funding strategy that fully acknowledges the growing diversity of student needs.

Any funding strategy must also confront the severe imbalance between spiraling costs on the one hand, and strained financial resources on the other. While average college tuition measured in constant dollars has risen almost 110 percent since 1981, the median family income has risen only 27 percent. This has had the most dramatic effects on lower-income students, who must devote an enormous and growing share of family income to college expenses. Financial aid has not kept pace with these rising costs.

Projected enrollment increases will exacerbate these problems. College enrollments will rise 20 percent over the next decade, the National Center for Education Statistics projects, potentially overwhelming already insufficient funding mechanisms. Because low-income students will comprise a substantial share of this enrollment increase, the financial barriers to college attendance threaten to reach critical proportions. This crisis promises to become all the more severe as lifelong learners flood back into the postsecondary system.

Throughout its history, the American system of higher education has brought our nation

enormous social and economic benefits. Now more than ever, nothing is more precious to individual and national prosperity than the quality of our colleges and universities. At the same time, that system faces greater, more complex challenges than ever before. In light of these challenges, colleges and universities must work to protect and nurture their value in a world marked by ongoing, radical transformation.

By providing an environment that promotes free and vital debate, the academy has long encouraged innovative thinking on issues of national and individual importance. It is imperative that the higher education community now bring this same tradition to bear on issues that will so profoundly affect its own future. In doing so, however, it cannot take refuge in familiar academic assumptions that this future will soon render obsolete.

Colleges and universities must confront the changing world with the honesty and intellectual integrity that have long been their hallmark, even if this process reveals the inescapable need for far-reaching institutional transformation. If they do not, they risk abandoning the very values that have sustained them for centuries. ♦

*Roberts T. Jones is president and CEO of the National Alliance of Business.*



**By Jane V. Wellman**

## Unfinished Agenda

**Transfer accountability should be a top state policy priority**

**T**HE GENIUS of the design of the American "system" of higher education is its promise of access, quality and success—not just for students who are wealthy or academically well-prepared, but also for adult learners, and those who are poor or in need of academic remediation. For the promise to be translated into reality, transfer from two- to four-year institutions has to be a viable, rather than a high-risk, path to the baccalaureate degree.

There are several different types of transfer: from two- to four-year institutions (2/4), from four-year to other four-year institutions (4/4), from four-year to two-year institutions (4/2), and from two-year to two-year (2/2).

National research tells us that roughly one-third of all first-time, degree-seeking students transfer at least once within four years of initial enrollment—about 25 percent of students in four-year institutions, and 43 percent for students beginning at two-year institutions. Among those who start in two-year institutions, about half transfer to a four-year institution, the rest to other two-year institutions.

Nationwide, the baccalaureate graduation rate for students who transfer from two- to four-year colleges after taking at least a semester's worth of credits is 70 percent.

Several forces coalesce to place new importance on 2/4 transfer as a special statewide policy priority:

- The bachelor's degree is fast replacing the high school diploma as the entry point to the workforce. While access to some college might have been good enough for earlier generations, that is clearly no longer the case.
- Twenty or more states face structural state budget deficits at the same time they need to expand postsecondary capacity just to find room for recent high school graduates. These states can save on expansion costs for new four-year institutions if they use community colleges for the first two years of college.
- Rising college tuitions and tightened admissions requirements in the public four-year colleges are forcing more baccalaureate-bound students into community colleges.
- Transfer effectiveness will be the key to continued national progress in educational equity for baccalaureate degree holders,

**Roughly one-third of all first-time, degree-seeking students transfer at least once within four years of initial enrollment.**

affecting far more students than the fate of affirmative action policy. Nationwide, estimates are that 80 percent of new college students will be students of color, many of whom are low-income and the first in their family to attend college. The U.S. has made some progress in reducing the ethnic group gaps between high school graduation and first-time college enrollment. The disparities widen again when it comes to baccalaureate completion, for the simple reason that the majority of students of color initially enroll in a community college, and do not persist to the baccalaureate. (Nationwide, only 34 percent of African American, and 35 percent of Hispanic, students who enter college persist to the baccalaureate degree five years later, in contrast to 50 percent for white students.)

Yet a look around the country shows that, despite its importance, statewide 2/4 transfer performance is not a priority in most states. Instead, the issues at the top of the policy agendas are politically sexier topics like fights over governance, affirmative action in admissions (not degree completion), the location of new research universities, and institutional wars

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over faculty superstars.

Part of the reason for the problem is that transfer policy requires a statewide rather than an institutional focus, and most states continue to approach planning at the level of the individual institution or sector rather than the statewide level.

Another part of the problem is that the metrics of transfer—figuring out which students to count, and when in their careers to count them—have always been problematic within higher education. A number of studies using similar databases have produced different answers to questions about transfer effectiveness: Depending on the way the question is asked, research can support the finding that transfer students persist and graduate with the baccalaureate at equal or even superior rates to native students; that the transfer function faltered for some time but is now returning; or that a false promise of transfer “ghettoizes” higher education by funneling high-risk students with little hope of getting the resources they need to succeed in higher education into poorly financed institutions. These statements are all true for some colleges and some students, but no one of them accurately characterizes state-level performance for any state.

***The bachelor's degree is fast replacing the high school diploma as the entry point to the workforce.***

Because the issue is so important, the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education commissioned a fresh look into state poli-

cy and transfer performance, to see what lessons could be learned about policies that improve performance. The states that have major investments in community colleges were identified, and the Center's “Measuring Up 2000” report was used to identify three at the high end of performance on student retention and degree completion (Florida, New York and North Carolina) and three at the low end (Arkansas, New Mexico and Texas).

Each state's policies and performance data on transfer were examined, looking at several dimensions of policy that might affect transfer performance: governance, data collection and accountability, enrollment planning, and academic policies affecting transfer such as core curriculum, articulation agreements, and credit transfer systems.

The research results were a little surprising, and slightly depressing. The states could not really be compared on 2/4 transfer performance separate from other aspects of completion and retention, because they collect data in different ways. So it was hard to be sure whether the differences between the “high” and “low” performers were attributable to success in 2/4 transfer or to other factors.

Having said this, there wasn't a lot of difference between the high-performing and low-performing states in their approach to state policy and transfer. All of them have paid a good deal of attention to the academic policy aspects of transfer, and have generally comparable policies in place affecting core curriculum, articulation agreements, transfer of credit policies, and statewide transfer guides, including web-based catalogues. Florida and North Carolina additionally have common academic calendars, and Florida and Arkansas have common course numbering systems.

The key difference between the three high-performing states and the others may lie in the statewide governance structure for higher education. Arkansas, New Mexico and Texas are all institutionally governed states, whereas the other three have stronger statewide governing capacities.

In New York, the two-year institutions are embedded within the State University of New York (SUNY) and City University of New York (CUNY) systems. North Carolina's Board of Governors for the University of North Carolina is also the statewide planning and coordinating board—a unique structure that puts statewide planning and performance assessment with the same agency that has responsibility for governing the four-year institutions

Florida historically has taken a statewide approach to planning, through a 2+2 structure that has explicitly directed the majority of baccalaureate degree seekers to community colleges for their first two years. Many of Florida's state universities were initially started as upper division rather than four-year campuses.

Arkansas, New Mexico and Texas all have state coordinating and policy boards, and pay attention in their research to transfer performance. They also have some two- and four-year institutions with a history of partnership and transfer performance. But they also have historically emphasized technical and vocational education over transfer for many of their institutions. And they don't have a statewide governance structure that forces a common policy and planning framework onto both the two- and four-year institutions.

In New York and Florida, the structure that supports performance seems to be the legacy of prior generations of state policy makers. In the last decade, New York has decentralized state responsibility for transfer performance to SUNY and CUNY, and no longer places statewide policy, planning and accountability at the top of its agenda. For several years in the 1990s, New York stopped statewide reporting of transfer altogether. (It now is returning.)

Florida similarly seems to be moving away from its historic commitment to transfer, despite the need to expand capacity for postsecondary education. Florida's plans to increase baccalaureate attainment are centered around expanding capacity in the four-year institutions, including extending baccalaureate authority to some two-year institutions, rather than improving 2/4 transfer effectiveness in community colleges.

North Carolina alone among the high-performing states has recently taken steps to energize its transfer policies, through statewide planning and policy work that resulted in the current framework. North Carolina clearly understands that it has to do a better job of increasing college-going rates and baccalaureate production, and that it is unlikely to have capacity to do all that needs to be done in the public four-year sector alone.

The research is most telling for what it reveals about what's missing in the approaches to

transfer policies in these states, because none of them uses all of the tools of state policy to energize transfer. Transfer is routinely included as one of many priorities for the community colleges, but none of these states has set clear statewide goals for 2/4 transfer performance. Their accountability structures typically focus on two-year college transfer performance instead of looking at the responsibilities of the four-year institutions.

The performance measures that are in place in the four-year institutions may actually work against the transfer priority, such as the requirement to report five-year retention and graduation rates. Since community college students rarely complete the baccalaureate degree in five years, this measure discourages four-year institutions from serving transfer students, particularly if they are funded on the basis of degree performance.

Most of the states confine transfer reporting to public institutions, leaving out the important role that is played by the private sector in accepting students for transfer. Only New York has a form of incentive funding for this aspect of transfer performance. North Carolina plans to include incentive funding for transfer in performance funding, but this mechanism may be derailed by the current budget crisis.

Beyond these slender examples, none of the states has adopted measures to recognize and reward institutions that are high performers in transfer effectiveness. Texas alone among the six states recently established a small financial aid program for transfer students; none of the other states uses financial aid to create student incentives to start their education in a community college before transferring. And none of the states has focused on the equity aspects of transfer performance, either as a policy priority or in its data reporting.

The three high-performing states do a relatively better job of retaining and graduating students of color: not a grand accomplishment, since baccalaureate retention for African American and Hispanic students hovers between a low of 28 percent and a high of 47 percent across the six states. While the baccalaureate degree may not be the best or only goal for all students, there is no public policy rationale for why it should be a lesser goal for students of color than for white students.

### Going to the next level

Improving statewide performance on 2/4 transfer will be essential to improving performance on degree productivity, cost effectiveness and educational equity in postsecondary education. The states in this study have gotten into the habit of treating transfer as a technical matter, and are focusing their attention on academic and institutional strategies, rather than using statewide policy to affect transfer performance.

The goal of state policy should be something more than getting out of the way of effective individual or institutional performance: State policy should be used to set goals, recognize, reward and improve performance. There can be no doubt that proportionately more students than ever before are going to end up in the community colleges in the next decade. Paying attention to state transfer policy—through statewide plans, goals, performance measures, financial incentives (and sanctions), and student aid—can make a huge difference in ensuring that greater community college enrollments do not become the cause of even greater social and economic stratification within higher education.

If higher education is to continue to play its role as an engine for economic advancement and social mobility, state policy attention to transfer accountability has to be at the top of the agenda. ♦

*Jane V. Wellman is Senior Associate at the Institute for Higher Education Policy, in Washington, D.C. Her full report on transfer policy will be published by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education in August.*



## Revamping the SAT

### Will the modified test make the grade?

By Rebecca Zwick

**R**ICHARD ATKINSON, president of the University of California, has pronounced himself “delighted by the College Board's decision” in June to approve substantial changes to the SAT I, calling it “a major event in the history of standardized testing.”

The redesigned SAT (which I'll call “SAT 2005” in recognition of its intended completion date) will differ from the current SAT I in three major ways. First, it will include a writing section consisting of multiple-choice questions on grammar and usage, plus an essay that students will have 20 to 30 minutes to complete. Second, it will replace the much-maligned verbal analogies items with short reading comprehension questions. Finally, the math section will be beefed up to include more advanced content. Currently, the math questions are based on first-year high school algebra, plus some geometry. SAT 2005 will add items based on a second year of high school algebra.

According to Atkinson, these changes will “focus student attention on mastery of subject matter rather than mastery of test-taking skills.” But will the modified SAT make the grade? Right now, SAT 2005 exists only as a gleam in the College Board's eye, and many questions about the effects of the changes will be impossible to answer until the exam is

actually developed and field-tested. But considering the many criteria the university and the College Board have established, it may be hard for the revamped test to satisfy everyone.

Just what is expected of SAT 2005? Let's consider the UC side first. In February 2001, Atkinson announced that he wanted to eliminate the use of the SAT I in University of California admissions, advocating an immediate switch to college admissions tests that are tied closely to the high school curriculum.

One year after Atkinson's statement, a university-wide faculty committee, the Board on Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS) released a policy statement that essentially echoed Atkinson's view. BOARS recommended that the university replace the currently accepted admissions tests with three new exams based on California's high school curriculum—a "core achievement examination" in reading, writing and math, plus two one-hour subject-area tests.

The committee, which concluded that achievement-oriented tests are "philosophically preferable to tests that purport to measure aptitude," wanted to convey the message that "the best way to prepare for postsecondary education is to take a rigorous and comprehensive college-preparatory curriculum and to excel in this work."

**Considering the many criteria the University of California and the College Board have established, it may be hard for the revamped SAT to satisfy everyone.**

The February 2002 policy paper stipulated that the UC admissions test should be fair across demographic groups, should measure "mastery of content in UC-approved high school preparatory coursework, and should provide information to students, parents and educators enabling them to identify academic strengths and weaknesses, [and] should be demonstrably useful in predicting student success at UC."

In late March, when discussions were underway among faculty, administrators and the UC Board of Regents about the specifications for the new California test, the College Board made a stunning announcement: It proposed a set of

changes to the SAT—those just approved—which, not coincidentally, seemed very much in line with UC's criteria. This meant that UC could avoid the enormous burden and expense of developing and implementing a new test and, as a bonus, could take credit for influencing a testing giant. The College Board stood to gain too, of course, if it could avert the loss of a big customer.

Although the modifications it outlined were influenced by UC's demands, the College Board made it clear that it had its own set of requirements for SAT 2005 as well: The test must measure "reasoning based on critical reading, writing and math skills related to college success." It must also maintain its psychometric quality, including the ability to predict college success, and must not show larger score disparities between white and "underrepresented" students than the current SAT I. Finally, it must be scored on a scale equivalent to the one used for the SAT I so that it can "maintain trend data across years."

Can a reborn SAT live up to both UC's demands and the College Board's own requirements? In fact, the many goals for the new test embody several substantial dilemmas:

- Can the SAT measure students' mastery of California's college preparatory courses and still be a reasoning test? By including more advanced math content, adding a writing section, and substituting short reading items for verbal analogies, the revamped test will be somewhat better aligned with the college prep courses UC applicants are expected to take.

But as a membership organization consisting of more than 4,000 educational institutions with a wide range of views about university admissions criteria, the College Board can only move so far: Obviously, a test that is too focused on California's needs would alienate high schools and colleges elsewhere. Although the Board says that SAT 2005 will "reflect changes in classroom instruction," it is careful not to describe the new version of the exam as an achievement test.

- Can the SAT assess writing skills and advanced math skills without increasing score gaps among ethnic, socioeconomic and language groups? Ironically, a plan to add an essay component to the SAT 12 years ago met with objections from the University of California on just these grounds. According to a 1990 *Education Week* article, the essay requirement came "under severe criticism...from California education and legislative officials who [said] the revisions [would] adversely affect recent immigrants and students whose native language is not English."

Ultimately, UC's opposition was instrumental in squelching the proposed inclusion of a writing component in the main portion of the SAT.

- What about the math section of SAT 2005? In the past, the SAT has prided itself on its focus on math problem-solving skills, rather than specific course content. According to a recent College Board publication, "If you know the basic properties of common geometric figures, if you have some basic familiarity with algebra, and if you have a basic understanding of properties of numbers, then you know enough to take this test."

If the test is now modified to include math questions that rely on a second year of high school algebra, SAT 2005 scores could be more sensitive to differences in instructional quality than SAT I scores. This could lead to greater score disparities among ethnic and socioeconomic groups, a result that would be undesirable from the perspective of both UC and the College Board.

- Can the SAT serve both as a test of academic strengths and weaknesses and as a predictor of college grades? UC and the College Board agree that SAT 2005 must continue to be useful in predicting college performance. But UC would also like the test to serve a diagnostic purpose—to provide information about students' mastery of specific skills. To give precise and useful diagnostic information, a test must include a sufficient number of items in each skill area.

Presumably the skills of interest to UC are those included in California's high school curriculum. To maintain a test's ability to predict college grades, however, it is essential to include questions that are closely related to the demands of college courses. These two principles of test development will not necessarily lead to the same set of test questions. A test designed to maximize prediction of college grades will not necessarily be an ideal diagnostic test, and vice versa.

- Can the SAT make the desired changes and still produce scores equivalent to those on the current test? Will all the changes, considered collectively, mean that SAT 2005 is measuring something different from the current SAT I? If so, how will it be possible to "maintain trend data across years." If not, are the changes worth making?

The University of California Regents are expected to support the use of the newly modified SAT at UC. But these tough questions about the SAT and, more broadly, about the role and purpose of college admissions testing, will still need to be resolved. Educators, politicians and the press are sure to continue debating these issues at least until SAT 2005 makes its debut. ♦

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**Can the SAT assess writing skills and advanced math skills without increasing score gaps among ethnic, socioeconomic and language groups?**



## TEXAS

from page 1

African American. Fifty-six percent of these students chose either UT-Austin or Texas A&M-College Station.

Almost half of the 7,337 places in last fall's freshman class at UT-Austin were filled by ten percenters, while the rest of the class was selected on the basis of staff analyses of grades, SAT scores, two written essays and activities in and out of the high school classroom.

The campus turned away 11,000 eligible applicants who were not ten per-

**The total group of ten percenters has done better than other freshmen. A 2000 survey found their mean grade-point average was 3.26, compared to 2.86 for others.**

centers, including some from families that had attended UT-Austin for generations. So far, campus officials report, there has been a lot of grumbling but no law suits.

Vargas and her high school classmate, Melissa Rojas, say they could not have enrolled without the help of UT-Austin's new "Longhorn Scholarships" that pay tuition and fees for outstanding students from low-income families. Most of these students are graduates of 70 predominantly Hispanic or African American high schools that have been targeted by campus recruiters. Up to 350 students a year receive the scholarships, which are supported by a combination of campus and alumni funds.

"My family definitely doesn't have enough money to help," Vargas said. "It was set in stone that I get here on a His-



**Bruce Walker, director of admissions at the University of Texas-Austin has been a leader in campus efforts to increase minority enrollments.**

panic scholarship."

In its first year the ten percent law did little to increase minority enrollment at UT-Austin, leading Director of Admissions Bruce Walker and his colleagues to conclude: "To change the future, we had to acknowledge [there were] lots of social nets where UT was not visible," Walker said.

The admissions staff analyzed Texas public high schools and quickly identified 39 where parents had a mean annual income of \$35,000 or less. These schools were sending few, if any, graduates to UT-Austin. Later, the list was expanded to 70, almost all with predominantly Hispanic or African American enrollments.

Recruiters, ranging from university President Larry R. Faulkner to members of Walker's admissions staff, began to visit these schools, talking up the advantages of a UT-Austin education and inviting students to tour the campus.

Walker believes these visits have made a big impact. "When President Faulkner tells assembled students in this once-ignored school, 'You in this room can compete,' it changes the dynamic," he said. The Longhorn Scholarships triggered other sources of financial help. Students discovered they qualified for other scholarships.

"The benefits are showing up here," Walker said. "Siblings are coming in now. That's what you want to happen. If you can get a whole family of siblings, you've changed not only their lives and futures but what the community thinks about. That's a powerful social statement."

After the federal court decision in what is known as the Hopwood case, Hispanic and African American undergraduate enrollment dropped sharply at UT-Austin. Now, thanks to the new scholarships and recruiting efforts, the percentages are almost back to the level of 1996, the last year of affirmative action admissions. (See chart.)

Although the numbers are still low, some believe the campus has become a model for boosting efforts to catch up with the state's rapidly changing ethnic and racial mix, expected to reduce whites to a minority within three years.

"It sends a message—to remain open to anyone who did well in high school," said Texas Higher Education Commissioner Don W. Brown.

So far, these students have come close to matching other UT-Austin freshmen in both grades and persistence, despite lower SAT scores, campus officials report. "Longhorn Scholars"—86 percent Hispanic and African American—have compiled a mean grade point average of 2.73, compared with 2.93 for all freshmen. Their dropout rate after two years was 11.5 percent, compared with 9.2 percent for other freshmen.

"They're doing well," said mathematics professor Uri Treisman, who had 30 Longhorn scholarship winners in his introductory calculus class of 108 last semester. "They require more careful advising and



**Texas State Demographer Steve Murdock warns that the state must increase college enrollments among Hispanics and African Americans if the Texas economy is to flourish.**

faculty sensitivity. They need encouragement but these kids don't freak out. They are accustomed to doing what they are asked to do."

The total group of ten percenters has done better than other freshmen. A 2000 survey found their mean grade-point average was 3.26, compared to 2.86 for others. After three years, their retention rate was 85 percent, while it was 78 percent for other first-year students.

"In other words, strong academic performance in high school is a demonstrably better predictor of success in college than high standardized-test scores," UT-Austin President Larry R. Faulkner wrote in a letter to *USA Today*.

The ten percent admissions policy, the Longhorn Scholarships and a new state student financial aid program called Texas Grants have led to a gradual increase in the proportion of underrepresented students at UT-Austin. But this is not true at Texas A&M-College Station, the state's other flagship school, where only nine percent of undergraduates are Hispanic, and only 2.5 percent are African American.

Statewide, Hispanics are 24 percent of undergraduate enrollment at public institutions, and African Americans are 10.6 percent. That compares with an overall state population that is 32 percent Hispanic and 12 percent African American.

Many Texas business and education leaders believe those numbers must be increased substantially, and there must be other

reforms in both the K-12 and postsecondary systems, if the state is to maintain a vigorous economy.

"There's both cause for hope and caution" in the modest increases in minority enrollment at UT-Austin, said Steve Murdock, Texas state demographer and chairman of the Department of Rural Sociology at Texas A&M. Other hopeful developments cited by Murdock include generally higher test scores in elementary and secondary schools across the state and the new Texas Grants program.

## Diversity in Houston

**T**HE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON, Texas' third largest campus, with more than 30,000 students, is the state's most diverse public campus. At present, 34 percent of the undergraduates are white, 22 percent Hispanic and 18 percent African American.

Achieving that level of diversity has not been difficult for Houston, since 85 percent of its students are from the area, which has some of the state's largest clusters of African American and Hispanic populations. But to make room for more minority students, the campus took some expensive and aggressive steps. It increased the number of freshmen by half in five years, and enrollment for the two minorities doubled, according to Ed Apodaca, associate vice president for enrollment.

"Enrolling students is not a business where a customer comes in once through the front door; it's who stays," he said. "So we emphasize students who fit well here—those who really have to work while going to school." The momentum created by the expansion and recruitments, he said, had led the campus now to seek to encourage more white enrollment.

The working class flavor of the undergraduate enrollment that Apodaca describes provides an unusual blend on a campus that has developed respected graduate programs, some of which reflect the city's reputation as a regional center for the arts.

A reporter for the *Houston Chronicle* described UH as a "hometown commuter college that has grown from a working man's academy offering night classes at a local high school to a respected campus capable of flashes of brilliance." ♦

—Carl Irving

Texas Grants, begun in 1999 with strong bipartisan legislative support, now provide \$149 million in financial aid for 44,038 needy students throughout the state, with another \$162 million earmarked for the coming academic year. Still, this is a drop in the bucket compared with student financial aid programs in California, Illinois, New York and some other states.

On the "cautious side," Murdock pointed out that only 27 percent of Texas 18-to-

**At Texas A&M-College Station, one of the state's two flagship schools, only nine percent of undergraduates are Hispanic, and only 2.5 percent are African American.**

24-year-olds are enrolled in college, below the national average of 33 percent; the percentage of Texas adults who hold high school diplomas dropped from 39th to 45th nationally between 1990 and 2000; and the state fell from 23rd to 27th place in total number of college graduates during that same decade.

Murdock links these low numbers with the state's large population of poor and uneducated immigrants, but he says states with similar problems do better than Texas. For example, to match California's college-going rate, the state would have to add 200,000 students immediately.

Murdock has told legislators and business leaders that the state will pay a heavy

price for not producing more college graduates: The poverty rate will increase three percent, and state average household income will decline \$3,000 in constant dollars by 2030.

A major challenge is to increase Hispanic enrollment in higher education. Their segment of the state's population is projected to overtake whites in three years and they are expected to become the state's overall majority in 2026.

Yet Hispanics account for only 24 percent of undergraduate enrollments, even though they make up 38 percent of Texans of traditional college-going age. Many of the Hispanic students are concentrated on a few campuses near the Mexican border. In 2000, 31 percent of Texas public high school graduates were Hispanic; 52 percent were white, but among those who finished in the top ten percent academically, 64 percent were white, only 18 percent were Hispanic.

State elected officials have responded to warnings from Murdock and others. College prep courses will be a "minimum requirement" for admission to a public campus in Texas by 2008. Students will be able to opt out only with consent of a parent or guardian and a school counselor or administrator. (About half of the state's high school students, and almost all of the "ten percenters," already take these courses.)

After months of regional meetings with business leaders and with school and college officials, the statewide boards for both K-12 schools and higher education agreed on a set of goals to be achieved by 2015.

Two of the goals are quite specific:

- Add 500,000 college and university students to the state's current enrollment of just under one million.
- Double the amount of federal science

and engineering research spending in Texas.

Two other goals are somewhat vague:

- Increase by half the number of degrees, certificates and other "identifiable student successes from high-quality programs." (However, no definition of "high quality" is given.)
- Increase substantially the number of nationally recognized college level studies. (But, again, no guidance is offered as to what constitutes a "nationally recognized" program.)

The plan also sets a target of increasing the number of nationally ranked top-ten research institutions and health science centers in Texas from none to one by 2005 and to two by 2010, and to increase the number of top-ten public research universities from none to one by 2010 and to three by 2020. Again, "nationally ranked" is a term that is subject to many interpretations.

This is a massive undertaking in Texas, with its 11 boards of regents for 42 degree-granting campuses and eight medical centers, plus local boards of trustees for 71 community colleges. And this does not include private institutions, which can go their own way.

However, the plan has strong legislative support from both parties. In addition to establishing the Texas Grants and mandating that most high school students must take college prep courses, the legislature has agreed to an advertising and marketing campaign to boost enrollments among underrepresented students. Five million dollars was appropriated to start the campaign.

State Senator Teel Bivins, a conservative Republican from Amarillo and chairman of the Senate Education Committee, recently sponsored a bill to help high schools that are in the bottom ten percent academically. The bill passed and was signed into law by Governor Rick Perry, also a conservative Republican.

Beginning this fall, schools with the lowest percentage of college-going students are to be linked with nearby college campuses to "establish clear, achievable goals" toward improvement. So far, the state has identified 91 high schools, with 5,000 students. Efforts are underway to develop partnerships with neighboring institutions across state lines and with private schools, in areas of the state where there are no public campuses.

With state officials pushing, and with the modest gains at UT-Austin, there is considerable pressure on the 44,000-student Texas A&M campus at College Station to increase its minority enrollment, but so far without much success.

Almost 82 percent of the undergraduates at College Station are white; nine percent are Hispanic; 3.2 percent are Asian; and 2.5 percent are African American, according to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. The UT-Austin cam-



*Freshman seminars and other special programs are intended to help minority students adjust to the University of Texas-Austin, says Vice Provost Lucia Albino Gilbert.*

pus is more diverse: 62.7 percent white; 15.9 percent Asian; 13.6 percent Hispanic; and 3.6 percent African American.

"The statistics are not encouraging," said Steve Murdock, the state demographer and one of several nationally prominent members of the A&M faculty.

"It (A&M) is clearly an institution that will have to take very strong action if it wants to become at all representative of the population. [It is] an institution that has made no progress in the last eight years—it's still predominantly white."

College Station once emphasized agriculture and mechanics, hence the "A&M," but long ago became a comprehensive campus, with studies in almost every area of higher education.

Like UT-Austin, the campus has drawn

**"Strong academic performance in high school is a demonstrably better predictor of success in college than high standardized-test scores."**

—UT-AUSTIN PRESIDENT  
**LARRY R. FAULKNER**

generations of Texans and, perhaps even more than Austin, has a solid niche in Texas lore that is related to the "Corps," a military training program that once dominated an all-male campus. A&M now has more women students than men, and the Corps—its members still wear shiny boots and spurs—has shrunk to about 1,500.

"Both Austin and A&M suffer from being considered white institutions," a state official said, "but Austin has been more successful in changing that image."

Joseph A. Estrada, A&M's assistant provost for enrollment, thinks the campus' remote location is partly to blame for the

*continued next page*

## Minority Enrollments at Texas' Flagship Campuses

Enrollment of African American and Hispanic undergraduates at the two Texas flagship campuses—the University of Texas, at Austin, and Texas A&M, at College Station, are still below the level of 1996, when a federal district court ruling led to the banning of affirmative action admissions policies in the state.

### UT-Austin undergraduate enrollment:

	Fall 1996	Fall 2001
White	23,345 (65.2%)	24,200 (62.7%)
African American	1,479 (4.1%)	1,335 (3.5%)
Hispanic	5,247 (14.7%)	5,239 (13.6%)
Asian	4,456 (12.5%)	6,126 (15.9%)
Other	1,262 (3.5%)	1,709 (4.4%)

### Texas A&M undergraduate enrollment:

	Fall 1996	Fall 2001
White	25,896 (80.3%)	30,321 (81.8%)
African American	1,075 (3.3%)	921 (2.5%)
Hispanic	3,429 (10.6%)	3,325 (9%)
Asian	1,045 (3.2%)	1,199 (3.2%)
Other	795 (2.5%)	1,296 (3.5%)

(Source: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board)

**from preceding page**

low numbers of Hispanic and African American students.

"Every sixth grader in Texas will visit the state capitol," only a few blocks from the UT-Austin campus, he said. A visit to A&M requires a long, lonely drive from almost every direction, along sometimes poorly marked roads, past endless flat fields and tiny villages. The only time visitors arrive en masse is for home football games, when the 82,000 seats in the biggest stadium in Texas usually sell out.

The campus has started to bus in an

***The Texas Grants program, which provides financial aid for needy students, is a drop in the bucket compared with student financial aid programs in California, Illinois, New York and some other states.***

array of high school students for visits. "We are building bridges," Estrada said. "We know it won't be long before a number of the top ten percent will be of Hispanic origin."

Like newly arrived minority students at UT-Austin, those at A&M talked about big challenges, but they also stressed the loneliness and unease they feel as nearly invisible minorities.

"I didn't feel comfortable at first," said

Jorge Castillo, a sophomore planning to major in business management. "My first instinct was to find people who look and act like me. I found I could make friends with others but it took a little while."

Sophomore Roberto Farias spoke of "culture shock—all those rich white guys in the dorm, and their etiquette. A&M has this big stereotype reputation of being awkward for minorities—a lot of people are scared of coming here."

Freshman Akilah Lee, who came to A&M from a predominantly African American high school in Houston, said, "At first I felt self-conscious, being the only black in the class. Were they all looking at me? Do these people accept me?"

At UT-Austin, special efforts are made to deal with these problems. Lucia Albino Gilbert, vice provost and professor of educational psychology, said the goal is to "connect students to the riches of the university, to stay and get a good degree." She described the challenge as seeking answers for a common question: "How do we improve undergraduate education at one of the best universities in the world, where many students come and don't engage?"

Most first-year students are enrolled in a non-credit seminar, one hour a week, with a student adviser who has been trained to answer their questions and make them feel welcome on the Austin campus. Longhorn Scholars—from predominantly minority high schools and low-income families—attend special classes taught by a group of instructors that includes members of the campus Academy of Distinguished Teachers.

There are also freshman seminars, taught by regular faculty members, that stress writing. And there are "forum" seminars that introduce freshmen and sopho-



JANA BIRCHUM, BLACK STAR, FOR CROSSTALK

**Sophomore Melissa Rojas (right) and fellow "ten percenters" (left to right) David Herron, Rosalinda Ruiz and Bruce Walker on the University of Texas-Austin campus.**

mores to a variety of subjects, from art and health care to Mexican American history and culture.

"All of this has to do with an increasingly diverse student body, with a large percentage the first generation to go to

college," Gilbert said. "We're trying to make the size of the university into an opportunity for students."

Some UT-Austin faculty members sound less hopeful, or at least more uncertain about the new admissions policy.

"I understand why the legislature did it, [but] it's always bad to take away from the faculty decisions about who should make up the student body," said Larry Carver, a professor of English and associate dean of the College of Liberal Arts, which enrolls a third of the undergraduates in its courses.

During a recent interview, Carver, who was acting admissions dean when affirmative action was banned by the federal district court, debated with himself over the consequences of the new admissions policy.

"From the faculty standpoint, it's not perfect," he said. "The faculty does not have much impact on the selection process...Some (students) with low SATs are not equipped for courses. [But] so far we haven't seen problems. Students are self-selecting. They don't come here if they are unprepared. We are learning to recruit better. We're more open, more diverse, although we could do without the ten percent plan...It's a problem, really, below a 1,080 SAT score.

"Yet the top ten is a good indicator of success," Carver added. "It probably won't work in engineering or liberal arts. We're getting fewer now (in liberal arts) and more are going into communications, business. It's not a bad idea. This campus would become less relevant if it only took from 20 high schools."

*Freelance writer Carl Irving lives in the San Francisco Bay area.*

## "Catastrophic" Court Ruling

**A**T THE GRADUATE LEVEL, some faculty members are far less sanguine about what happened at UT-Austin. The ban on affirmative action was "catastrophic" at the law school, said law professor Douglas Laycock, a faculty member for 21 years. After the court ruling, black enrollment dropped 90 percent and Hispanic about 50 percent.

The court decision had a doubly negative effect, he said, because it not only halted financial aid to minority students eligible for admission, but also "put off" others who "didn't want to be part of a highly visible handful. The first year after the ruling we had four blacks enrolled and TV crews were sticking cameras in their faces.

"We invested a lot of effort in recruiting and blacks are up to about half of where they were and Hispanics less so," Laycock said. However, although some keep hoping for a "magic bullet," there is none in sight. A ten percent admissions program wouldn't work at graduate level, he said, because, unlike the Texas high schools, most undergraduate education is not segregated.

The case challenging admissions poli-

cies at the law school began in 1992, when law school applicant Cheryl Hopwood and others sued the university, claiming they were denied admission because the law school gave preferential consideration to African American and Mexican

***After the ban on affirmative action, black enrollment at the UT law school dropped 90 percent and Hispanic about 50 percent.***

American applicants. The Fifth Circuit of the U.S. Court of Appeals, with jurisdiction over Texas, Mississippi and Louisiana, ruled in 1996 that it was unconstitutional to consider race as a factor in admission. The so-called Hopwood decision affected all levels of admission, and later was applied to all public campuses in the state.

The state twice petitioned the U.S.

Supreme Court to review the decision, but the court declined to hear the case.

UT President Larry R. Faulkner officially announced last November that the university would not appeal the Hopwood decision. "We have invented new ways to build participation of talented minority students on a color-blind basis, and we think we have some of the best programs in the country," he said.

A recent five-to-four decision which upheld affirmative action at the University of Michigan law school was made by a more moderate majority in another court, but also faces an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court.

"That the ten percent plan does not affect medical and professional schools poses great uncertainty," said Marta Tien-da, a sociology professor at Princeton University. "A great deal of the future rests on the success of the top ten percent plan providing an adequate pool of minority college graduates admissible to the top medical schools in the state," she wrote in an analysis. ♦

—Carl Irving