

SUBJECT: Admission and scholarship policies for graduate and professional schools

COMMITTEE: Higher Education — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 8 ayes — Rangel, F. Brown, Farabee, Goolsby, J. Jones, Morrison, Uher, West
0 nays
1 absent — E. Reyna

WITNESSES: For — Al Kauffman, Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund; Felicia Escobar, The National Council of La Raza
Against — None

DIGEST: HB 1641 would amend Education Code, ch. 51 by adding subchapter V to specify factors to be considered by a graduate or professional school program when making decisions about admissions or scholarships. It would require a general academic teaching institution or a medical or dental branch of a university to consider all of the following 11 factors:

- ! an applicant's academic record as a high school student and undergraduate student;
- ! an applicant's socioeconomic background while the applicant attended elementary and secondary school and was an undergraduate student, including any change in that background;
- ! whether the applicant would be the first generation of the applicant's family to attend or graduate from an undergraduate, graduate, or professional program;
- ! whether the applicant has bilingual proficiency;
- ! the applicant's extracurricular responsibilities while attending elementary and secondary school and as an undergraduate student, including whether the applicant was employed, helped to raise children, and other similar factors;
- ! the applicant's region of residence at the time of application and, if the applicant graduated from a public high school in the state within the last 20 years, the region in which the applicant's school district is located;
- ! the applicant's involvement in community activities;

- ! the applicant's demonstrated commitment to a particular field of study;
- ! for admission into a professional program, the current comparative availability of members of that profession in the applicant's region of residence while the applicant attended elementary and secondary school;
- ! whether the applicant was automatically admitted to a general academic teaching institution as an undergraduate student under Education Code, sec. 51.803; and
- ! the applicant's personal interview.

During the admissions or competitive scholarship process, an applicant's standardized test scores only could be considered in comparison to scores of other applicants from similar socioeconomic backgrounds. If the standardized test score were used, it would have to be considered together with the other compensatory criteria and could not account for more than 25 percent of the weight assigned to these factors.

HB 1641 would require the graduate or professional program to publicize a description of the factors considered in making admission and competitive scholarship decisions. The program would have to provide this information not later than one year before the date that applications for admissions and competitive scholarships were first considered by the program. These requirements would not apply to admissions and scholarships for the 2002 fall semester, but programs would have to make such information available by December 1, 2001, for the 2002 fall semester.

The bill would authorize the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to adopt rules relating to the operation of admissions and competitive scholarship processes.

The changes in law that would be made by this bill would apply beginning with admissions and competitive scholarships for the 2002-2003 academic year. THECB, each general academic teaching institution, and each medical and dental unit would have to adopt the relevant rules and policies by December 1, 2001.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

HB 1641 would establish a working plan to encourage graduate and professional programs in Texas to ensure, within the constraints of current law and court rulings, that the population of these programs reflect the population of the state. It would give each program the flexibility to tailor an admissions policy that considers other important criteria that also predict academic success, in addition to standard quantitative measures. By doing so, HB 1641 would help increase the accessibility to graduate and professional school for many of the state's students, thus helping to "close the gaps" in participation as called for in THECB's recent report.

The bill would offer a uniform plan, to be made available to the public, that would provide consistency and transparency to the admissions process. It would help ensure that graduate and professional schools considered more than test scores when evaluating a student's application. According to recent demographic research, minority student populations in Texas graduate and professional schools do not reflect statewide figures of 11 percent African-American and 32 percent Hispanic. For example, THECB statistics indicate that in Fall 1999, only 3 percent and 5 to 6 percent of the students enrolled in doctoral programs at UT-Austin and Texas A&M University were African-American or Hispanic, respectively. It is crucial that Texas provide educational opportunities to all its citizens, especially populations that traditionally have been underserved by the educational system and that are well on their way to becoming the majority population.

HB 1641 would lay the foundation for keeping Texas competitive in the global economy by boosting currently low rates of college participation. Continuing the trend of low college participation among our growing minority population could make Texas less competitive economically, because the work force will lack educational requirements to attract cutting-edge industries. In a recent "State by State Report Card for Higher Education," prepared by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, Texas received a D+ in terms of the percentage of students who persist and graduate from college. Texas is likely to lose new jobs, especially in high technology, to states and nations whose populations are better trained. By de-emphasizing standardized test scores in the admissions and scholarship process, HB 1641 would provide a more complete set of factors for institutions to consider when evaluating a student's potential academic and professional success. HB 1641 would bring Texas in line with a national trend toward de-emphasizing the consideration of test scores in the

admissions process. Standardized tests measure a students' test-taking ability, not their aptitude for learning. Statistics show that minorities and economically disadvantaged students do not perform as well on such standardized tests as Anglo, Asian, and economically-advantaged students. Furthermore, standardized tests do not measure a student's work ethic, life experience, creativity, or potential for academic and professional success. Studies by medical societies show that medical students with low MCAT admissions scores performed just as well after graduation as high scoring students.

HB 1641 would require institutions to consider the applicant's region of residence while the applicant attended elementary and secondary school and whether this region was comparatively underserved by the graduate or professional area to which the applicant has applied. Consideration of this factor could help relieve critical shortages in certain graduate and professional fields throughout the state. This requirement also could help ensure geographic diversity among graduate and professional schools in the state.

The *Hopwood v. Texas* decision that barred use of affirmative action programs in Texas' higher education institutions has discouraged minority student applications and enrollment in Texas and has put the state at a competitive disadvantage with out-of-state schools in recruiting students from diverse backgrounds. When the best students of any background leave Texas to seek better educational opportunities, they often do not return, to the detriment of the entire state. The *Hopwood* ruling does not prohibit Texas from promoting a diverse student body that reflects the state's population. HB 1641 would encourage such diversity within the structure of *Hopwood* and subsequent attorney general rulings.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

The consideration of bilingual proficiency, an applicant's socioeconomic background, and their responsibilities while attending school, could serve as a proxy for race. To the extent that such factors are proxies, HB 1641 could violate *Hopwood* and subsequent attorney general opinions regarding the consideration of race and ethnicity in the awarding of scholarships in Texas' graduate and professional programs.

Applicants for admission to graduate and professional degree programs as well as for competitive scholarships come from different undergraduate

institutions, have taken different courses with different professors under different grading systems. By limiting the weight to be given to standardized test scores, HB 1641 would reduce the ability of institutions to use a “common yardstick” to evaluate the qualifications of students for admission to graduate programs or for scholarships.

NOTES:

The companion bill, SB 621 by Barrientos, was reported favorably as substituted by the Senate Education Committee on March 26.

In 1999, the Senate passed a similar bill, SB 1356 by Barrientos, which was reported favorably by the House Higher Education Committee and placed on the General State Calendar, but too late to be considered by the House.