A percent plan produces more students of color than simple admission on test scores largely because of school segregation. But the levels of racial segregation in Texas differ for Latinos and African American students, and the mechanistic admissions process excludes equally talented students at less racially isolated schools.

- There are very few education regions in Texas where African American students are so isolated that a percent plan would mean they are automatically admitted to college. None of the education regions in Texas has a majority of African American students, and only one of the state’s 73 school districts with more than 15,000 students (Beaumont) has a majority of African American students (Lee et al., 2011; NCES, 2010). On average, African American students in Texas attend schools with half as many members of their own race as Latino students. Thus, it is not surprising that African American students constituted only an average of 3.7% of UT Austin’s entering class during the period the percent plan was in place without an accompanying holistic policy that allowed the consideration of race.

- The majority of all public school students in Texas are Latino (50.3% in 2010-2011). Latino students are also the majority in 8 of the 20 education regions in Texas, with four regions enrolling over 70% Latinos. Despite these high levels of segregation, the Latino student presence at the University under the percent plan, an average of 15% from 1998 to 2004, did not reflect the significant population of Latino high school graduates, 31% in 1997-1998 (NCES, 2000).

- The mechanistic admissions process under the percent plan prevents UT Austin from considering certain individuals with special talents and qualities who may be essential to improving the educational experiences of all students. For instance, African American and Latino applicants from educationally demanding integrated or largely white schools may not be in the top 10% of their class, due to factors beyond their control, such as tracking (Card & Rothstein, 2007; Schmidt, 2012; Oakes, 2008; Venezia & Kirst, 2005). And yet, these students’ previous experience in integrated schools gives them the skills and understanding that could greatly help the University to leverage the benefits of diversity.

Percent plans alone will not yield the level of diversity needed to leverage the educational benefits of diversity at public education institutions in other states, or at the nation’s great private universities.

- Studies show that replacing a holistic admissions policy with a top 10% plan nationwide would not successfully restore the number of students of color that would be achieved under a holistic policy that considers race at the most selective four-year campuses (Howell, 2010; Espenshade & Radford, 2009; Long, 2004; Reardon et al. 2012). These findings hold true for a number of situations, including those in which high schools are assumed to be completely racially isolated, where admission under the percent plan is extended to students from out of state and guaranteed at any institution of choice, and where percent plan admissions are in place at private colleges and universities.
In the real world, a percent plan alone would be even less effective than the research simulations in achieving the level of diversity that can be attained with a holistic admissions policy that considers race. This is because patterns of racial isolation in high school differ greatly across states, students face multiple practical barriers to college access, and the guarantees of automatic admissions policies are more restricted than those used in the simulations.

Forgoing the consideration of race in admissions would further exacerbate the racial and socioeconomic gaps among those attending college.

Simulations prepared by researchers at Stanford University show that gaps in enrollment in terms of both race and income have become substantially larger since the 1980s, despite a narrowing academic achievement gap (Reardon et al, 2012). These simulations also show that the growing racial disparities in national college enrollment cannot be explained by differences in income according to race and ethnicity. At any income level, white students are two times more likely than African American students to attend a highly selective college. In the upper half of the income distribution, white students are twice as likely as Latinos to attend a highly selective college.

Despite myriad “race-neutral” approaches, selective undergraduate institutions in states with bans on affirmative action have experienced significant declines in student body diversity.

Bans on race-conscious admissions policies in multiple states (California, Washington, Florida, and Texas when Hopwood was in effect) have led to a 1.74 percentage-point decline in African American enrollment and a 2.03 percentage-point decline in Latino enrollment at the most selective institutions (Hinrichs, 2012). Backes (2012) confirmed a 29% drop in the African American share of students and a 20% drop in the Latino share of students enrolling at top tier institutions after affirmative action bans were implemented across six states.

After Michigan’s Proposal 2 prohibited the consideration of race as a factor in admissions, the University of Michigan experienced a substantial drop in racial diversity. From 2006 (the year before Proposal 2 could have affected enrollment) to 2010, the percent of African American students enrolled decreased by over 25%, while that for Latino students fell by nearly 20% (Yun, Moses & Marin, 2012).

Similarly striking declines in racial diversity have been documented at the University of California flagship campuses of Los Angeles and Berkeley since Proposition 209 was passed. Between 1997 and 1998, enrollments of African American freshman at UC Berkeley declined by 53%, while Latino enrollees fell by 45% (UC Office of the President, 2011). In the same period African American enrollments at UCLA dropped by 38%, while Latino enrollments declined by 30%. Although there has been a modest recovery in absolute numbers since that time, neither campus has regained the diversity it had in 1995, and admissions and enrollments for African American and Latino students continue to decline at both campuses, relative to their changing percentages in the high school graduate population.

Racial diversity has also dropped significantly in the areas of business, law, and medicine that train future leaders and serve the health needs of the nation.

Comparing two years (1995-1996) when the six public business schools in the University of California system could consider race in admissions to the post-Proposition 209 years (2000-2011) when they have been prohibited from considering race, the average percentage of entering African American students dropped by 58% (Kidder, 2012). Moreover, between 2000 and 2011, many of the
University of California business schools had not one single African American or American Indian student in their entering classes.

- In the period it has been without a Grutter-like policy in admissions (1997-2011), the UC Berkeley Law School enrolled an average of 12.5 African American students annually, only half of what the annual enrollment had been (25.7) when the law school was able to consider race in its holistic admissions plan (1970-1996). A similar drop occurred at UCLA Law School, despite a remarkable increase in the numbers and strength of the applicant pool over the decades and intense recruitment efforts.

- At California’s medical schools, the percentage of entering underrepresented minorities also dropped from 23.1% in 1993 to 14.3% in 1997—the figures before and after the consideration of race as a factor in medical school admissions was challenged (Steinecke & Terrell, 2008). The average in the decade since (16.4%) is still considerably below pre-Proposition 209 levels, even as the state’s non-white population soars. Myriad race-neutral efforts in California, such as automatic admissions for top high school students, outreach, academic enrichment, and financial aid, have not reversed these trends.

- Similar declines were seen in Texas after Hopwood v. University of Texas prohibited institutions from considering race as a factor in admissions. In 1995, underrepresented minorities were 21.4% of first-year medical school enrollees in Texas, but this percentage dropped by one-fifth from 1997 to 2002, to an average of 17.2% (MALDEF, 2005).

Racial diversity has also dropped significantly in graduate science fields critical to industry and defense

- Bans on Grutter-like policies in admissions at public institutions across four states (California, Washington, Florida, and Texas when Hopwood was in effect) have led to a 26% drop in the percentage of engineering graduate students who are Latino, African American, or Native American, and a 19% decline in the natural sciences (Garces, 2012).

- These declines lead to a lack of the diverse perspectives needed in these fields to foster the innovation necessary to tackle complex research problems and advance scientific inquiry. They also make it more difficult to meet the nation’s urgent need to produce one million more students with science, technology, engineering, and mathematics degrees to meet workforce projections and keep America internationally competitive.

References


