

Unruly behavior

The top 10 percent law treats some future Aggies unfairly before they arrive

More than 100 years ago, British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli coined the saying, "There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies and statistics." Last week, a study released by Princeton sociologist and Texas native Marta Tienda confirms Disraeli was right. Tienda's report concludes that competitive students in Texas are not being harmed by House Bill 588, which guarantees high school seniors ranking in the top 10 percent of their class a spot at the Texas public university of their choice. Numbers are important in evaluating students for admissions to college, but the single factor of a high school grade point average cannot tell the whole story. The Princeton study does not address the most important failure of the top 10 percent law: the fact that it does not treat all high schools equally. This is a law which is an obstacle to accomplished students and a law that should be dismantled. Tienda's ambitious study surveyed 5,200 Texas high school seniors, focusing on those ranking in the second 10 percent of their class. She discovered that approximately one out of every four students from this group of students who wished to attend were denied admission to Texas A&M or the University of Texas. From this she concluded, "It is difficult to argue that second decile students' access to the public flagships has been undermined by H.B.588." Even if the numbers did tell the whole story, a more than one in four chance of

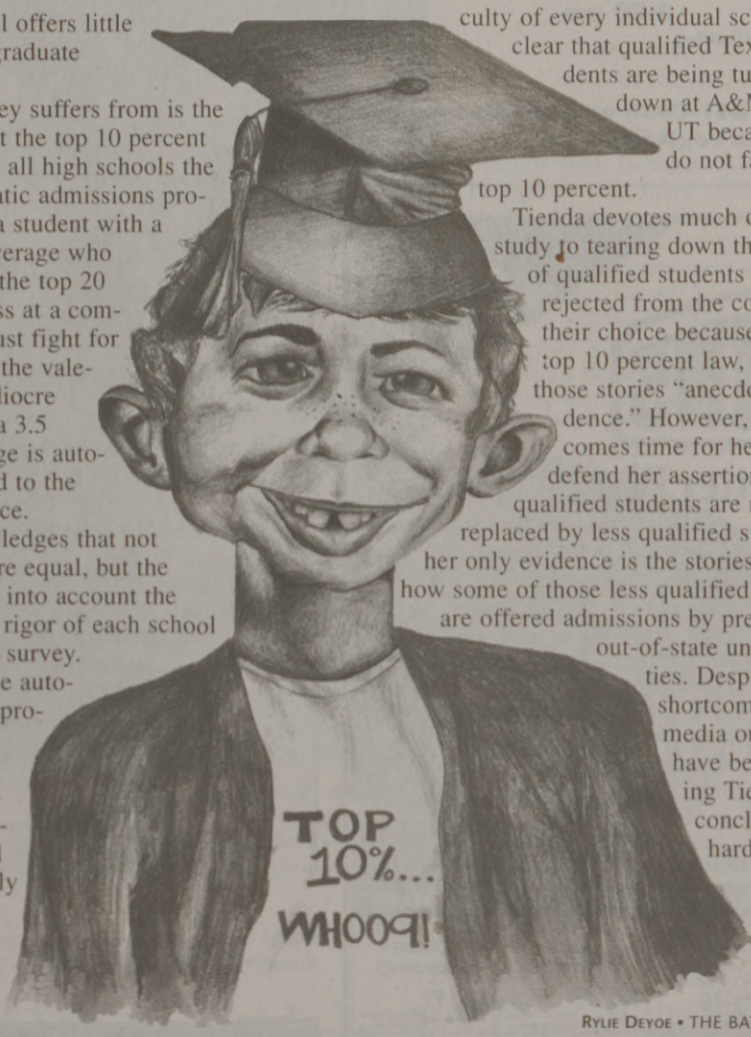


MATT MADDOX

being rejected still offers little comfort to undergraduate applicants.

What the survey suffers from is the same problem that the top 10 percent law does: It treats all high schools the same. The automatic admissions program means that a student with a 4.0 grade point average who does not place in the top 20 percent of his class at a competitive school must fight for admissions while the valedictorian at a mediocre high school with a 3.5 grade point average is automatically admitted to the school of his choice.

Tienda acknowledges that not all high schools are equal, but the study fails to take into account the varying degree of rigor of each school represented in the survey. Fundamentally, the automatic admissions program is flawed because it bases admittance to college not on a competition among all applicants, but only among the local peers of an applicant. While there is no easy way to compare the diffi-



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culty of every individual school, it is clear that qualified Texas students are being turned down at A&M and UT because they do not fall in the top 10 percent.

Tienda devotes much of her study to tearing down the stories of qualified students being rejected from the college of their choice because of the top 10 percent law, calling those stories "anecdotal evidence." However, when it comes time for her to defend her assertion that qualified students are not being replaced by less qualified students, her only evidence is the stories about how some of those less qualified students are offered admissions by prestigious out-of-state universities. Despite this shortcoming, media outlets have been touting Tienda's conclusions as hard fact.

Interestingly, Tienda may have an agenda for raising support for the automatic admissions program. Her study ends with the conclusion that the "optimal solution for Texas" would be for universities to use race as an admissions factor. Considering that the original support for the top 10 percent law came from affirmative action proponents in the Texas Legislature, Tienda's assertion that race should count in admissions reveals a potential bias for her support of the program.

The solution to the problem of the top 10 percent law is an overhaul or complete end to the program. Following what California has done, Texas could guarantee automatic admissions to a Texas public university rather than to the school of an applicant's choice. This would maintain the educational benefits of the program while reducing the number of spots at flagship public schools locked up by under-qualified students.

More importantly — and despite the wishes of those such as University of Texas President Larry Faulkner — the students of Texas deserve to be judged based on merit. Set asides in the form of House Bill 588 don't have a place in the real-world competitive environment of college. This is one time when the numbers do lie.

Matt Maddox is a senior political science major.

Wrongful accusations

Ted Kennedy's presumptions that Bush orchestrated the war hurts the country

As he shook his head in disgust for the majority of President George W. Bush's State of the Union address, Sen. Ted Kennedy, D-Mass., once again demonstrated his distaste for conservative policy in his typical immature manner. The recent recipient of the George Bush Public Service Award has done great deeds as a senator and public servant, but a recent comment made regarding the Bush administration's involvement in Iraq tops off and summarizes Kennedy's longstanding and mindless Bush-bashing streak of comments.



CHRIS LIVELY

American history.

The president repeatedly mentioned that post-9-11 America is a different scenario — one that many liberal politicians have failed to recognize. Bush was sincere and passionate about envisioning a more secure world. It cannot be said that the world is a worse place with the liberation of millions of Iraqis and the capture of one of the most infamous and brutal dictators in history.

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There was no guarantee of capturing Saddam Hussein or finding weapons of mass destruction, but Bush disregarded his approval ratings to do what he thought necessary to improve the well-being of a nation and a world. Why would a president confronted with the inevitability of civilian casualties and the possibility of chemical and biological attack on his own troops take that path to boost his political ratings?

Kennedy is renowned for his candor when critiquing Bush. And, in most circumstances, a politician should be credited for speaking his or her mind when it comes to

political matters. After all, one significant virtue of a democracy is allowing multiple ideologies to compete against each other to win over public opinion.

In addition, this continuing competition allows for the evolution of a necessary system of checks and balances between the parties. But there is a difference between a political mind keeping another in check and one set out to annihilate the other. Sen. Kennedy represents the latter.

Aside from Kennedy's inadequately supported arguments, what should be considered most important is that Kennedy's contribution to America in a time of conflict here and abroad is nonexistent. The country needs skeptics to monitor and critique the government, but only in a decent and mature manner. Kennedy and other politicians who claim that going to war was a mistake must avoid using the situation as only a political weapon.

As the presidential election day nears, both parties will inevitably continue to pummel the other. But as American troops continue to risk their lives everyday in the face of ongoing violent attacks, even the most fanatical of liberal politicians must refrain from declaring their efforts as products of some fictional and politically ambitious leader. The number of coalition lives that are lost grows every day, and, as America has its hands full and tries to make progress in the Middle East, it needs politicians who are more interested in the unity of a country than partisanship.

Chris Lively is a senior sociology major.

MAIL CALL

Legacy policy had little effect

Dr. Gates plainly states in his letter that no one admitted into this University over another candidate solely because of his legacy.

Having a legacy wasn't worth a whole lot in the first place. Only four points on a scale of 100. Persons of impoverished families were given six. So, as for the people who think the legacy program is some sort of neo-Nazism, the numbers prove just the opposite.

Lets compromise. Remove all mention of race off applications, remove affirmative action and then, when everyone is really admitted based on merit, not on race, not on income, then and only then, should we remove the legacy program.

Noah Johnson
Class of 2007

Alumni loyalty is most important

Duke University has affirmative action and legacy admissions. What prevents Texas A&M from having the same?

Perhaps the public nature of the university is a consideration, but if Aggie alumni wanted to follow the Duke plan by restoring legacy and affirmative action, who can doubt their political abilities in Texas? State Sen. Jeff Wentworth tells an El Paso reporter that the 10 percent law is raising enough complaints to attract the legisla-

ture's attention. "But here's the question: is Aggie hostility to affirmative action greater than their political desire to continue a legacy program? And if hostility to affirmative action exceeds alumni loyalty at Texas A&M, what does that say about the temperament of Aggie culture when it comes to racial diversity?"

Greg Moses
Class of 1981

Parking plan forgets students

In response to Natalie Yount's Jan. 22 article:

Who does the University serve? Well if we ask Phil Brand, it sounds like it should be him. Ask some faculty members, it sounds like it should be them. What about the thousands of undergraduates here that work more than one job, and are still in debt up to their necks? Without these students, Mr. Brand's, along with the faculty's, reserved spaces would still be pasture. Why does a staff member think he is so worthy of a parking space when the ones who pay his salary need to fight for parking and then walk the distance to their classes? Does this make sense? Why are the undergraduates here at A&M treated so poorly?

Of the faculty members that complained about not reaching classes on time from far-away parking spaces, how many will not allow students into the classroom once class has begun, telling students

they should be earlier so they can get a parking spot? My guess is probably more than a few. Let's level the playing field. What's wrong with a student asking their professor why can they not get here early enough to get parking and make it to class on time?

George J. Hager
Graduate Student

Students cannot accept hate crime

I missed something on the campus tour I took a few years back and have been living with this realization since my freshman year at Texas A&M. I missed that part on the tour where Aggies commit hate crimes against fellow Aggies, and it is acceptable for everyone to turn their head. My friend was beaten up this weekend by a fellow Aggie because he is gay. He is part of the "Aggie family." Since when has hate become part of the Aggie family? Sure we can say, "not all Aggies are like that." But we are only as strong as our weakest link.

Erin Collins
Class of 2003

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