

## Top stories

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### **A&M's minority drive hits a plateau**

A campaign for diversity grapples with campus image

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COLLEGE STATION — Texas A&M University's high-profile campaign to increase minority representation on campus has stalled after some gains, with the percentage of black and Hispanic students among the freshman class remaining unchanged for the third consecutive year.

Of the 8,078 freshmen enrolled this fall, 14 percent are Hispanic and 3 percent are black, despite a record number of applications and acceptances for the minority groups, according to A&M's preliminary counts.

While applications provide only a loose indication of how many students might enroll, the new numbers raise questions about the effectiveness of efforts by the state's second-largest university to become more racially and ethnically diverse.

"We still face the challenge of convincing minority students who are admitted to actually enroll," interim President Eddie Davis told faculty members recently.

Attracting and enrolling qualified black and Hispanic students is a problem at most selective public universities, whose oft-cited goal is to be a microcosm of their states. But the hurdle may be higher at A&M, partly because the school does not consider race as a factor in admissions.

Many other universities embraced affirmative action after a U.S. Supreme Court decision in 2003, but A&M did not. Since then, the College Station flagship has invested \$31 million in programs to increase minority enrollment, such as scholarships for first-generation students and recruitment centers in Dallas, Houston, San Antonio and South Texas.

Campus leaders point to the programs as reasons why more black and Hispanic students are applying and gaining admission to A&M. Still, only 49 percent of Hispanic students and 43 percent of black students who were accepted enrolled this fall — a seven-point drop for both groups from two years ago. Roughly 60 percent of admitted white students enrolled.

As a result, black and Hispanic students make up the same percentage of this fall's new class as in 2005 and 2006. At the University of Texas at Austin, Hispanics account for 20 percent of the freshmen, up from 18 percent two years ago. Black students make up 6 percent, compared with 5 percent in 2005.

"The real problem is that, even with a larger number of applications and larger number of admits, the yield sank," said Alice Reinartz, assistant provost for enrollment at A&M.

### **Time for leadership**

A&M surveyed the students who turned down its invitation to enroll, and more than half said they had chosen UT-Austin or an out-of-state school. Some chose Texas colleges of lesser stature because of better financial aid offers, Reinartz said.

Amid the competition for the best and brightest minority students, A&M plans a \$125 million fundraising campaign to finance scholarships. The school also plans to increase the size of awards and to make financial-aid offers to prospective students earlier in the year.

But money is only part of the problem, administrators and students said.

The issue is exacerbated by lingering perceptions of A&M as all white and all military. It was a military training college that did not allow black and female students until 1963.

Also, A&M's outreach to Hispanics is still relatively new.

"Many of them don't see a difference between institutions, so they look at cost and location," said Deborah Santiago, vice president for policy and research at Excelencia in Education, a nonprofit policy group. "That's something that College Station needs to confront."

### **Campuses compete**

A&M is trying to address the issue with two recruitment centers in the Rio Grande Valley. Recruiters make house calls, selling the school to prospective students and their parents, and helping them fill out admissions and aid applications.

Campus leaders said the early returns are encouraging. Two of A&M's top three feeder high

schools for Hispanic freshmen this fall are in Laredo, where the university's newest recruitment center is located.

Andrew Garza, a senior studying biomedical science, said he chose A&M because of the quality of academic programs and the small-town atmosphere similar to that of his hometown, Wharton. The university, he said, needs to do more to make itself known to Hispanics.

"A lot of them are choosing to stay home, but we're getting some," said Garza, executive director of the Hispanic Presidents Council, an umbrella group for Latino student organizations at A&M. "It's going to take time."

The key, he said, will be the person selected as A&M's next president. Many of the diversity-related initiatives began under former President Robert Gates, who left 10 months ago to become the U.S. secretary of defense.

State Rep. Garnet Coleman, a Houston Democrat and member of the Legislative Black Caucus, agreed that Gates was committed to improving diversity.

He said the new numbers affirm his belief that it was easy for A&M to produce high-percentage increases in minority enrollment because so few attended the campus to begin with.

Coleman said rising tuition, which has increased 60 percent over four years to \$3,922 a semester, is the biggest problem. But he added that A&M sends a mixed message by not considering race in admissions.

Reinarz, however, said the university's admissions strategy is "on the right track," noting the increased numbers of black and Hispanic students applying and receiving acceptance letters.

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