

# Longhorns of the lower 90

By RICK CASEY

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PRINCETON Professor Marta Tienda likely doesn't expect that her study of Texas' "10 percent rule" will end parental paranoia.

When it comes to getting your children into the "right" school, anxiety trumps rationality.

If you missed Tuesday's front-page story, Tienda and a team of sociologists surveyed thousands of Texas high school seniors in 2002. Three-quarters of those who graduated in the second 10 percent of their high school classes managed to get into the University of Texas or Texas A&M if that was their top choice.

That may surprise parents who have protested the rule requiring that Texas public universities accept all applicants who graduated in the top 10 percent of their classes, even if they scored poorly on college entrance exams.

The parents' concern is that students who work hard and do well at highly competitive high schools will lose their seats at UT or A&M to less prepared students who were able to place in the top 10 percent at less challenging high schools.

I came to suspect the concern was overblown after I wrote a column last September about parents keeping bright, high-achieving children out of Bellaire High School because they didn't think they could squeeze into the top 10 percent.

It's a legitimate concern. Bellaire, one of the area's most competitive schools, regularly graduates students with 4.0 (straight A) averages who aren't in the top 25 percent, much less 10 percent.

But in the wake of that column I heard from half a dozen Bellaire graduates who finished below the 10 percent mark and won admission to UT-Austin anyway.

Their letters were eloquent and uplifting. They admired (mainly) the students with the highest grades, but they also had worked hard and, most importantly, felt they received a good education.

Not atypical was Lev Shuhatovich, who graduated last May. His letter is worth quoting at some length:

"Those parents worried about not getting into UT should reconsider. Bellaire is a wonderful school, with a great foreign language program (*sans* a few nuthouse teachers) and a great Auto Shop.

"I'm proud to say that I participated in those, and although I didn't have membership in the coveted National Honor Society or other such clubs, I was considered an average student.

"I graduated with a 3.8873 grade point average, nowhere near the competitive top 10 percent, although I was close to making straight A's. The University of Texas, I believe, looked at my essay. I showed a wide background and a vast knowledge for the engineering field for which I was readily accepted.

"The point is, you don't have to be in the top 10 percent to get into UT. That's merely a lawful guarantee. Grades and rank are not all they look at."

Shuhatovich said the top students achieved averages higher than 4.0 by taking only advanced courses and working obsessively.

"I instead enjoyed my time at Bellaire and didn't fret too much over my GPA. I took classes that weren't worth 5 points, like auto shop, and enjoyed every minute of them."

He concluded: "Now I'm proud to say I just finished my first semester at UT in electrical engineering. I made A's in my engineering classes and B's in others, as in high school."

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