

- SUBJECT:** Repealing cap on entering freshmen at UT-Brownsville
- COMMITTEE:** Higher Education — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 7 ayes — Rangel, F. Brown, Goolsby, Morrison, E. Reyna, Uher, West  
0 nays  
2 absent — Farabee, J. Jones
- WITNESSES:** None
- BACKGROUND:** The University of Texas at Brownsville (UTB) is an upper-division school, offering junior, senior, and graduate-level courses. Since 1991, UTB has had a partnership agreement with Texas Southmost College (TSC) under which the two institutions share the same campus and office space. TSC offers lower-division courses and occupational or technical courses not offered at UTB. In 1993, UTB and TSC became accredited as a consolidated entity, and they now operate as one university. The institutions have different governing boards but the same president.
- The 75th Legislature in 1997 enacted SB 274 by Lucio, allowing UTB to offer lower-division courses to support bachelor of arts and bachelor of science degree programs. It also allowed the University of Texas System board of regents and the Southmost Union Junior College District board of trustees to agree on the number of entering freshmen who can enroll in UTB every year. Under Education Code, sec. 78.07, the number of entering lower-division students may not exceed 900 until the 2005-06 academic year.
- DIGEST:** HB 2344 would repeal the statutory cap on the number of lower-division students who can enroll at UTB in academic years before 2005-06.
- The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2001.

SUPPORTERS  
SAY:

The cap on the number of enrolling lower-division students at UTB originally was intended to protect TSC's enrollment by not allowing too many students into UTB. However, enrollment at TSC is strong, with about 7,000 students, as opposed to UTB's enrollment of about 2,000.

For universities and community colleges that have more standard partnership agreements, protecting enrollment at the community college is a valid concern. Universities and community colleges that have such agreements strive to maintain their autonomy while working together as complementary institutions. However, UTB and TSC do not have a traditional partnership agreement because they are essentially one school. Their arrangement allows a seamless transition for TSC students who decide to continue their higher education and also helps UTB to identify students who want to go straight into a four-year degree plan. This partnership operates efficiently and meets the higher education needs of the community.

Lifting the cap on the number of lower-division students would allow UTB to attract and accommodate more students. The 900-student limit applies to both freshmen and sophomores, so under current law, UTB never can have more than 900 in both lower divisions. This hampers the school's ability to recruit and attract students.

According to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, enrollments in public and private colleges and universities are not keeping pace with the state's booming population. Removing the cap would allow UTB to maximize its grant scholarship funds. In some years, there has been more grant money available than students who could use it. UTB could use the offer of scholarship funds as a tool to encourage new students who otherwise might not be able to go on to higher education. This would increase the enrollment and graduation rates and continue UTB's commitment to provide accessible higher education to the community.

OPPONENTS  
SAY:

No apparent opposition.