

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
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H.B. 1427
By: Alonzo, Patrick (Zaffirini)
S/C on Higher Education
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Engrossed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Research data and other statistical information reveals that there are numerous barriers to recruiting and retaining economically and academically disadvantaged and minority students to many fields of medicine, including the profession of optometry. Individuals who are contemplating a career in the health care and who live in communities where there is a shortage of health care providers may not consider a profession in optometry because there is a shortage of individuals with that profession in those communities to serve as role models. To create an interest in becoming an optometrist, the profession needs to reach out to the underserved communities for students who could assist these communities by completing optometry training and returning to their communities to help meet the needs of the future.

The University of Houston College of Optometry (UHCO), which is the only professional school of optometry in the state of Texas, implemented a Health Career Opportunities Program (HCOP) in the fall of 1987 called the Texas Optometry Career Opportunities Program (TEXOCOP), which has become a model for other institutions. One of the program's current objectives is to offer a program that aids in the recruitment and retention of economically and academically disadvantaged students. Often these recruits are first generation college students, and through the program educators are able to provide the tools necessary for them to be successful by creating an academically challenging and stimulating environment where their skills and talents are nurtured and developed into future optometrists.

The program has been funded by a number of agencies and organizations including the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Bureau of Health Professions, University of Houston Central Campus, and UHCO. However, the program has experienced diminished funds, which has prevented it from functioning in the same capacity as when it was first implemented. The program currently takes place annually, but there is potential that it will be moved to every other summer.

H.B. 1427 provides a mechanism for recruiting economically disadvantaged students to the profession of optometry.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

This bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to any state officer, institution, or agency.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Subchapter C, Chapter 111, Education Code, by adding Section 111.43, as follows:

Sec. 111.43. OPTOMETRY CAREER PROGRAM. (a) Authorizes the college of optometry at the University of Houston to operate a summer program that prepares highly qualified, economically and academically disadvantaged junior-level, senior-level, and postbaccalaureate students from any public or private institution of higher education for advanced studies and a career in the field of optometry. Authorizes the program to include courses in improvement of study skills and Optometry Admission Test preparation courses, a review of selected undergraduate academic courses that are prerequisites for admission to advanced degree programs in optometry, academic courses that are designed to familiarize students with the course work in advanced degree

programs in optometry, clinical work, and extracurricular activities, including observing professionals working in the field of optometry.

(b) Requires the college of optometry, to the extent practicable, and consistent with the purposes of the program, to operate the program in a manner designed to assist students to obtain course credit for the program from their respective institutions of higher education.

(c) Requires the college of optometry to recruit eligible undergraduate or postbaccalaureate students for admission to the program, establish an application process for admitting eligible undergraduate or postbaccalaureate students to the program, develop reasonable requirements for admission to the program, monitor the implementation of the program, and assist in developing services, including career counseling, to support and encourage the pursuit of advanced studies and careers in the field of optometry.

(d) Authorizes the college of optometry to solicit and accept gifts and grants from any public or private source for the purposes of this section. Authorizes the legislature to appropriate money for the purposes of this section.

SECTION 2. Effective date: upon passage or September 1, 2007.