

## UTB-TSC looks to lower remedial load

By *ILDEFONSO ORTIZ*,  
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July 24, 2004 — A student's survival in college depends on preparation.

A freshman entering the University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College faces a 52 percent chance of entering an obstacle course of remedial courses in the first year — a method of preparing the student for undergraduate courses.

And even if the student passes the bulk of remedial courses, chances are they'll take six to seven years before graduating.

These are some of the findings from the UT System Accountability and Performance Report, which concludes that incoming UTB-TSC students are not prepared for college, take longer to graduate and require the most remedial courses in the UT System.

Some of the findings were attributed to socioeconomic circumstances and the number of students who must work to support families while attending college.

But that shouldn't translate into lower educational standards, said UTB-TSC President Juliet V. Garcia, noting that Brownsville students have shown a mental capability to excel.

“(Do socioeconomic factors) seem to hurt our kids when they go to a chess tournament?” Garcia said about the university's award-winning Scorpion chess team.

“I will not excuse it as a reason. If (students) can excel in chess, how can you tell me they can't excel in education?”

More than a quarter of UTB-TSC's nearly \$40 million in financial aid went to students taking remedial courses in the 2003-2004 school year, according to the university's financial aid office.

The university's director for academic advising, Eli Peña, said the school expects 1,500 freshmen this fall; half of them will need remedial courses.

Already 2,444 of the school's 11,003 students have taken at least one remedial course last year, according to the financial aid office.

Garcia said the figures show a large improvement over 1997 statistics, when the remedial rate was at 80 percent.

The spring 2004 academic course schedule listed 174 remedial courses in math, reading, writing and English; the fall schedule lists 141 remedial courses.

Despite the decrease, Therese Gallegos, assistant professor for English and speech, said high school students need better preparation for college.

“Students are not deciding to do enough reading and writing,” she said. “They haven't been pushed properly.”

Tom Welther, assistant professor for modern languages, said he sometimes sees students walk into his writing skills class with fourth- or fifth-grade reading levels.

“Half of my students fail,” Welther said. “Many times they are underprepared. Some don't do the work, but some do and they still fail.” [ildefonso\\_ortiz@link.freedom.com](mailto:ildefonso_ortiz@link.freedom.com)

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