

The 170-Hour Rule: Analysis of Students at Risk The University of Texas at Dallas



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The purpose of this document is to analyze the characteristics of the students at UT Dallas the Texas higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) has identified as being at risk of falling under the 170-hour rule. During the 75th Session of the state legislature, Senate Bill 1907 was passed. The Bill reduced the level of state funding provided for credit hours attempted beyond 170 hours for undergraduates. The Bill became law and was written into the education code, section 61.0595. The law provides exceptions for students enrolled in multiple baccalaureate degree programs, double major programs that require 130 or more semester credit hours for completion, and baccalaureate degree programs affiliated with health professions. The limit on credit hour support also does not apply to semester credit hours earned by the student 10 or more years before the date the student begins the new degree program. Additionally, semester credit hours earned for a previous baccalaureate degree, awarded by examination or procedure in which tuition is not charged, earned for remedial education, earned at a private school, or paid at the out-of-state tuition rate, do not count toward the 170-hour limit.

The data were obtained from the Coordinating board in three lists:

- 304 students enrolled in the Summer Semester of 1998, who had exceeded 170 hours,
- 307 students enrolled in Fall Semester of 1998, who exceeded 170 hours,
- 262 students enrolled in Fall Semester of 1998, who were approaching 170 hours (had exceeded 150 hours).

Removing duplicates revealed:

666	Students at risk for falling under the 170-hour rule
97	Of these were only on the summer list
414	Of the 666 have already reached 170 total hours
252	Had not reached 170 total hours as of the start of the Fall semester

These lists were combined with data derived from university's CBM001 Reports for the Summer and Fall Semesters of 1998 to characterize the students. Additional information was collected from the Student Information System.

Table 1 examines the data contained in the Coordinating Board lists for the types of semester credit hours listed. The lists from the Coordinating Board counted all hours attempted, including the Unfunded and Technical hours that are exempt from the 170-hour rule. While it appears that an overwhelming majority of the hours attempted were Funded hours, it should be noted that these might include some Technical Hours that the Coordinating Board mistakenly classified as funded.

Table 1: Types of Hours

Type of Hours	Total Number of Hours for All Students Listed	Percentage of Total
Funded Hours	118,127	96.4%
Unfunded Hours	1972	1.6%
Technical Hours	2416	2.0%
Total	122,515	100%

Table 2 presents the data for the percentage of a student's hours that are in the funded category. As can be seen, for 89 percent or 590 of the 666 students, more than 90% of their attempted hours appear to be funded hours as defined in THECB database. Since Unfunded and Technical hours are exempt from the 170-hour rule, the sections that follow will only examine the Funded hours attempted.

Table 2: Percentage of a Student's hours that are Funded Hours

Percentage of a Students' Hours That Are Funded Hours	Number of Students in Each Range	Percentage of Total
100%	387	58.1%
91%-99%	203	30.5%
81%-90%	53	8.0%
71%-80%	14	2.1%
61%-70%	3	0.5%
51%-60%	2	0.3%
41%-50%	0	0.0%
31%-40%	2	0.3%
21%-30%	0	0.0%
11%-20%	1	0.2%
1%-10%	1	0.2%
Total	666	100%

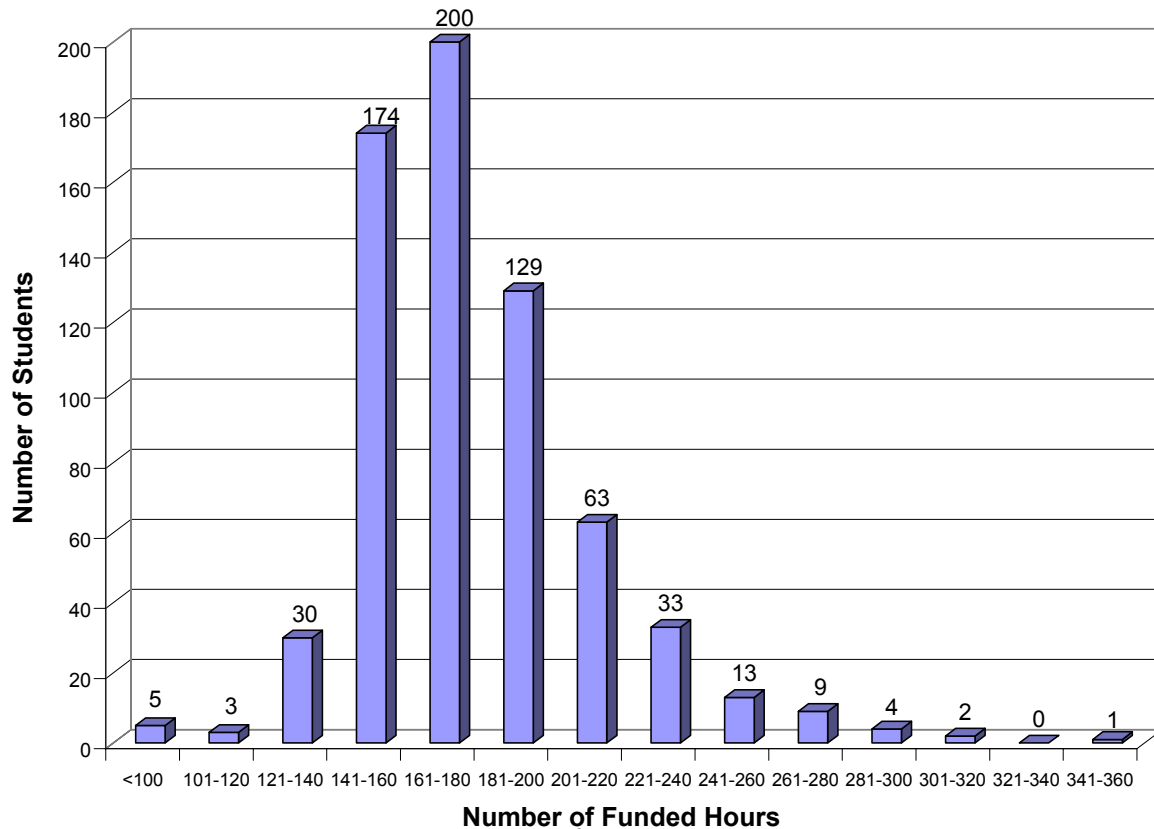
Number of Funded Hours Attempted

Table 3 and Figure 1 present the data for the number of funded hours. First, only 125 students attempted more than 200 hours. Second, the modal category appears right at the 170-hour limit. It may be that there is already in place some mechanism that successfully or otherwise removes students from the educational system as they near 200 hours.

Table 3: Number of Funded Hours

Number of Funded Hours	Number of Students in Each Range	Percentage of Total
>320	1	0.2%
301-320	2	0.3%
281-300	4	0.6%
261-280	9	1.4%
241-260	13	2.0%
221-240	33	5.0%
201-220	63	9.5%
181-200	129	19.4%
161-180	200	30.0%
141-160	174	26.1%
121-140	30	4.5%
101-120	3	0.5%
<100	5	0.8%
Total	666	100%

Figure 1: Number of Funded Hours Per Student



Funded Hours Attempted at a 2-Year College

Figure 2: Number of 2-Year College Hours per Student

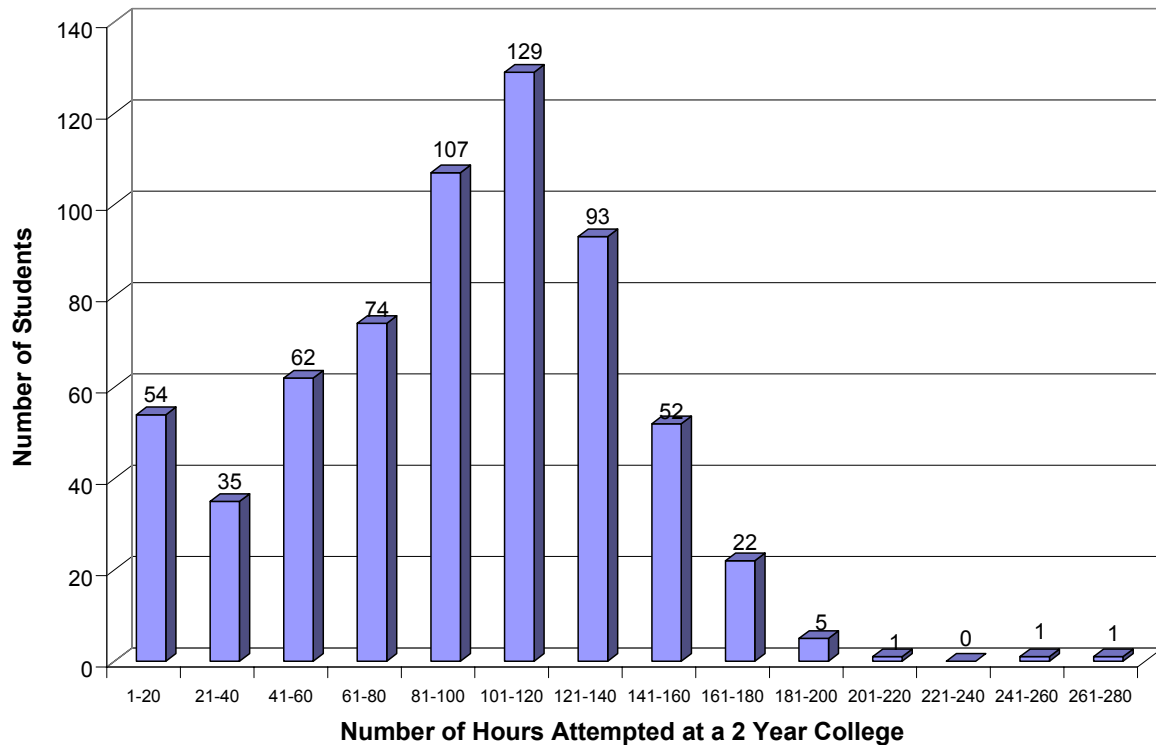


Figure 2 provides the data concerning the origin of the funded hours for students on UT Dallas' CB list. What is apparent from the data is that 392 of the 666 students, or 59%, attempted over 85 funded hours at a 2-year college. Eighty-five hours is significantly more hours than a student can transfer to UTD and over halfway to the 170-hour cutoff. Of the students on UTD's list, 304, or almost 46%, accumulated more than 100 community college hours. For students pursuing a four-year degree, this seems inordinate. Moreover, as shown in Table 4, 364 of the 666 students, or 57%, attempted more than half of their funded hours at a 2-year college.

Table 4: Percentage of Hours Attempted at a 2-Year College

Percentage of a Student's Funded Hours Attempted at a 2-year college	Number of Students in Each Range	Average No. of Funded Hours for Students in this Range	Min and Max Number of Funded Hours for Students in this Range
100%	13	147.69	3-273
91%-99%	12	164.42	133-250
81%-90%	52	141.10	95-181
71%-80%	78	130.41	100-200
61%-70%	114	116.82	66-191
51%-60%	115	100.97	72-180
41%-50%	69	84.99	12-159
31%-40%	67	64.94	45-111
21%-30%	38	44.87	31-59
11%-20%	30	28.10	9-47
1%-10%	48	9.85	3-26
0%	30	0	0-0
Total	666	89.44	0-273

Number of Schools Attended

The data in Table 5 are quite revealing concerning the academic careers of the students on UT Dallas' list. Forty-four percent or 294 of the 666 students **attended three or more schools before attending UTD**. If UTD is included, 503 of the 666 students, or 76%, have attended three or more schools.

Table 5: Number of Schools Attended*

Number of Schools Attended	Number of Students	Percentage of Total
8	2	0.3%
7	12	1.8%
6	34	5.1%
5	80	12.0%
4	166	24.9%
3	209	31.4%
2	159	23.9%
1	4	0.6%
Total	666	100%

*Includes UT Dallas

Schools Attended

Table 6 provides more detail concerning the schools the students have attended. First, it should be noted that, as shown in Table 5, most of these students have attended multiple schools. In Table 6, the students are included in the total for each school they attended. For example, if a student attended three different schools, they will be included in the number of students for each school. “Other Schools” includes schools that had fewer than ten of these students attend. While it is not surprising that schools close to UT Dallas would evidence the most attendance, what are surprising are the range of state institutions involved and the number of hours attributable to community colleges.

Table 6: Schools Attended

Schools Attended	Number of Students	Number of Hours
Austin Community College	31	1154
Blinn College	21	696
Brookhaven College	175	8812
Collin County Community College	140	7402
Cedar Valley College	12	394
Eastfield College	145	9070
El Centro College	44	839
Houston Community College	12	491
Mountain View College	34	1233
Northlake College	66	1945
Richland College	383	22,354
Stephen F. Austin University	18	867
Southwest Texas State University	13	467
Texas A&M University	56	3553
Tarrant County College – NE	25	768
Tarrant County College – South	20	883
Texas Tech University	36	2343
Texas Women’s University	28	1466
Tyler Junior College	10	464
University of Houston	19	599
University of North Texas	79	3574
University of Texas	50	2722
University of Texas at Arlington	93	4557
Other Schools	107	5616

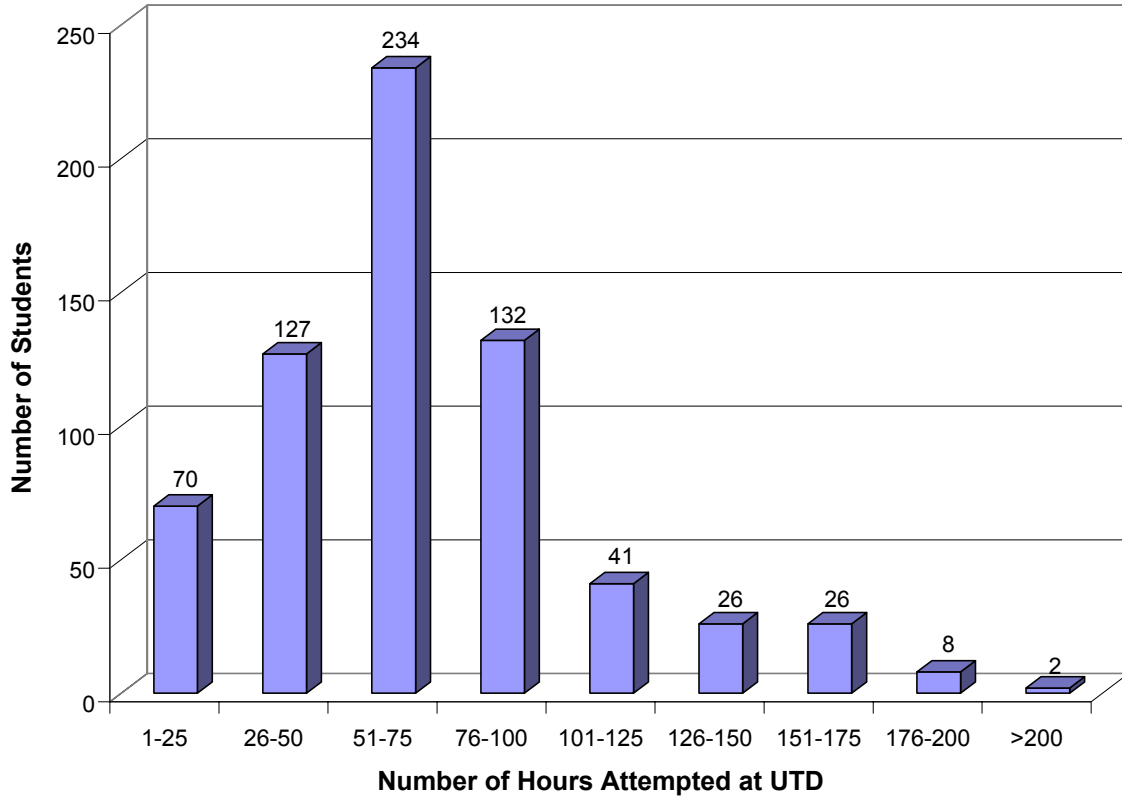
Number of Hours Attempted at UTD

Data were taken from the university's Student Information System concerning number of hours attempted and the number of hours earned at UT Dallas. The data in Table 7 and Figure 3 cover the courses these students took at UTD. The data are striking. **Only 14 of the 666 students, or 2%, have attempted over 170 hours at UTD. The vast majority of students attempted large numbers of hours at other schools.** Indeed, for students in the modal category (51-75), their hours appear to be well within the range of "normal" progress toward a degree. For these students, it is the hours attempted prior to coming to UT Dallas that has placed them on the at-risk list.

Table 7: Number of Hours Attempted at UTD

Number of Hours Attempted at UTD	Number of Students in Each Range	Percentage of Total
276-300	1	0.2%
251-275	0	0.0%
226-250	0	0.0%
201-225	1	0.2%
176-200	8	1.2%
151-175	26	3.9%
126-150	26	3.9%
101-125	41	6.2%
76-100	132	19.8%
51-75	234	35.1%
26-50	127	19.1%
1-25	70	10.5%
Total	666	100%

Figure 3: Number of Hours Attempted at UTD per Student



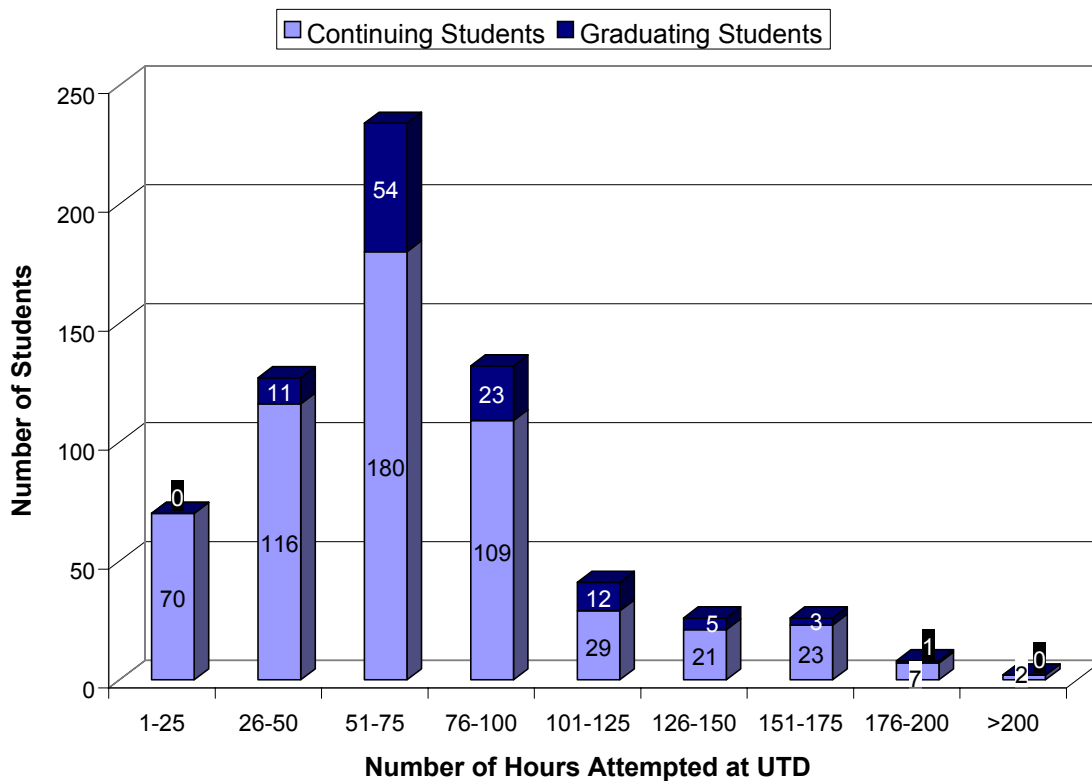
Graduating Students

Data were gathered on the number of these students who graduated in Summer and Fall of 1998 and the number of these students filing for graduation in Spring of 1999. As shown in Table 8 and Figure 4, 109 of the 666 students, or 16.4%, graduated or filed to graduate this year. Of these 109 students, 55 students graduated in the Summer of 1998, 29 students graduated in the Fall of 1998, and 25 students filed to graduate in the Spring of 1999. Except for the extremes, the data indicate that these students are making normal progress in their current degree plan.

Table 8: Number of Graduating Students by Number of Hours Attempted at UTD

Number of Hours Attempted at UTD	Number of Graduating Students in Each Range	Total Number of Students in Each Range	Percentage of Graduating Students in Each Range
>200	0	2	0.0%
176-200	1	8	12.5%
151-175	3	26	11.5%
126-150	5	26	19.2%
101-125	12	41	29.3%
76-100	23	132	17.4%
51-75	54	234	23.1%
26-50	11	127	8.7%
1-25	0	70	0.0%
Total	109	666	16.4%

Figure 4: Graduating Students by Hours Attempted at UTD



Completion of Hours Attempted at UTD

A student does not earn credit for courses they audited, retaken, dropped, or failed. These courses are counted as courses that are not completed. Table 9 examines the completion rates of these students by the number of hours they attempted at UTD.

As can be seen in Table 9, the average completion rate for these students is 63.8%. Table 9 also shows a 36.1% completion rate for students with over 200 hours at UTD. A large factor for these students was the high number of withdraws they each had (shown in Tables 11 and 12). One of these students had 42 W's and 15 F's, the other had 35 W's and 7 F's.

Table 9: Completion Rates by Number of Hours Attempted at UTD

Number of UTD Hours Attempted	Number of Students	Average Percentage Completed
>200	2	36.1%
176-200	8	62.8%
151-175	26	61.8%
126-150	26	63.6%
101-125	41	57.9%
76-100	132	69.1%
51-75	234	71.8%
26-50	127	56.2%
1-25	70	45.8%
Total	666	63.8%

Table 10 presents data on the percentage of hours completed at UT Dallas. First, it should be noted that 499 of the 666 students, or 75%, completed more than half of the hours they attempted at UTD. Secondly, it appears that a small percentage of students consistently fail to persist. There are a number of exogenous factors that contribute to non-persistence including, part time student status, family responsibilities, and job disruptions.

Table 10: Percentage of Hours Completed at UTD

Percentage of UTD Hours Completed	Number of Students	Average Hours Attempted	Average Hours Earned
100%	28	36.3	36.3
91%-99%	39	70.3	65.7
81%-90%	102	75.4	63.6
71%-80%	117	77.6	58.2
61%-70%	113	83.2	54.1
51%-60%	100	74.3	41.8
41%-50%	70	63.8	29.1
31%-40%	44	67.0	24.0
21%-30%	26	51.0	13.1
11%-20%	9	45.9	5.9
1%-10%	1	31.0	3.0
0%	17	11.3	0.0
Total	666	70.2	46.0

Number of Withdraws (W) and Failing Grades (F) Earned at UTD

Table 11 presents the data on the “Withdraws” from courses and the failing grades earned by the students on the 170-hour at-risk list. As can be seen, 393 of the 666 students, or 59%, have never earned a grade of F at UTD, and 316 of the 666 students, or 47%, have withdrawn from no more than two courses at UTD

Table 11: Numbers of W’s and F’s earned at UTD

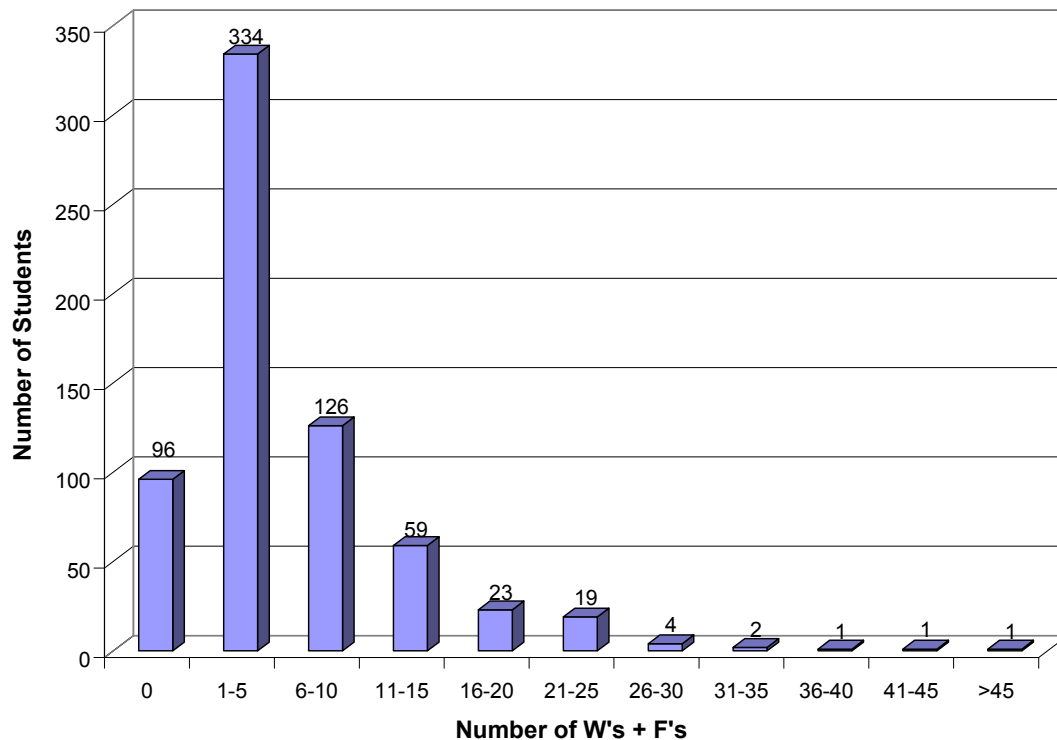
Number of W’s	Number of Students	Number of F’s	Number of Students
40-42	1	15	2
37-39	0	14	0
34-36	1	13	5
31-33	1	12	0
28-30	0	11	2
25-27	2	10	3
22-24	2	9	3
19-21	11	8	4
16-18	10	7	6
13-15	18	6	6
10-12	50	5	13
7-9	56	4	22
4-6	139	3	37
1-3	260	2	67
0	115	1	103
Total	666	0	393
		Total	666

Table 12 combines the data in Table 11. First, note that over half the students have five or less W/F grades and 556 of the 666 students, or 84% have a combined total of W's and F's of ten or less. This pattern strongly suggests that these students are making normal progress toward their degrees with disruptions that stem from non-academic interference in their lives.

Table 12: Number of W's + F's Earned at UTD

Number of W's + F's	Number of Students	Percentage of W's and F's to All of a Student's Courses
56-60	1	57.6%
51-55	0	
46-50	0	
41-45	1	56.8%
36-40	1	53.7%
31-35	2	57.1%
26-30	4	52.9%
21-25	19	48.2%
16-20	23	44.8%
11-15	59	39.6%
6-10	126	31.2%
1-5	334	17.9%
0	96	0.0%
Total	666	100%

Figure 5: Number of W's + Number of F's per Student



Current Class and Major

Table 13 shows the Class and Major of these students at UTD as of Fall 1998, or Summer 1998 for those not on the list for Fall. The freshmen and sophomores on this list are classified as such because, of the hours they transferred, only a small number of credits could be accepted. In some cases, the student has not sent a transcript to UTD from those other schools, and in at least one case, the student failed to inform UTD that they had previously attended another university. The 3 Post-Baccalaureate students, included in the table for analysis, should not have been included on the list by the Coordinating Board. First, note that almost 80% of the students are in their last thirty hours (i.e., they are seniors). Secondly, a fairly large number have shifted their major focus late in their ongoing academic careers, which lengthens their stay at the institution. **Twenty-eight percent of the students are seniors in engineering or computer science, which are high demand fields in the Dallas area, and graduates in these fields command high initial starting salaries. Most of these students are “retooling” and had they originally completed their first Baccalaureate degree, rather than attempting to economize, they would not be in the at-risk group.**

Table 13: Current Class and Major at UTD

Major	Freshmen	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Post-Bacc	Total
Arts & Humanities						
A&H				1		1
AP				6		6
HS			3	7		10
LIT			8	21		29
Engineering and Computer Science						
CS			18	132	2	152
EE	1		11	56		68
General Studies						
AMS				1		1
IS			11	41		52
Human Development						
NSC			1	4		5
PSY		1	7	24		32
SPA			3	8		11
Management						
ACC			10	28		38
BA		1	28	85		114
Natural Science and Mathematics						
BIO			8	42		50
CHM			3	8		11
GEO			1	5		6
MATH			1	6		7
PHY				4		4
STAT				4		4
Social Sciences						
ECO			6	19		25
GVT				13		13
PA			1	3		4
SOC			3	4		7
Undergraduate Studies						
UGS	2		6	7	1	16
Total	3	2	129	529	3	666

Demographic Characteristics

The demographics of UT Dallas' at-risk population provide additional context.

- **Gender**

There is a significant difference between UTD's overall undergraduate student demographics and the demographics of the 666 students. Fifty-nine percent, 396 of the 666 students, are male whereas only half of UTD's undergraduates are male.

- **Full-time and Part-time Status**

The status of the 170-hour at-risk students is significantly different from the general undergraduate student body. The data reveal that only 41.9% of the at risk students are full-time whereas 57% of the general student body are full-time. The at-risk population is significantly more part-time, and more likely to be working.

- **Ethnicity**

Table 14 presents data on ethnicity. The Asian and Hispanic students appear on the list with a higher frequency than one would expect based on their percentage of the undergraduate population. With regard to both groupings, and particularly Asians, many of these students are first generation in college and/or immigrants.

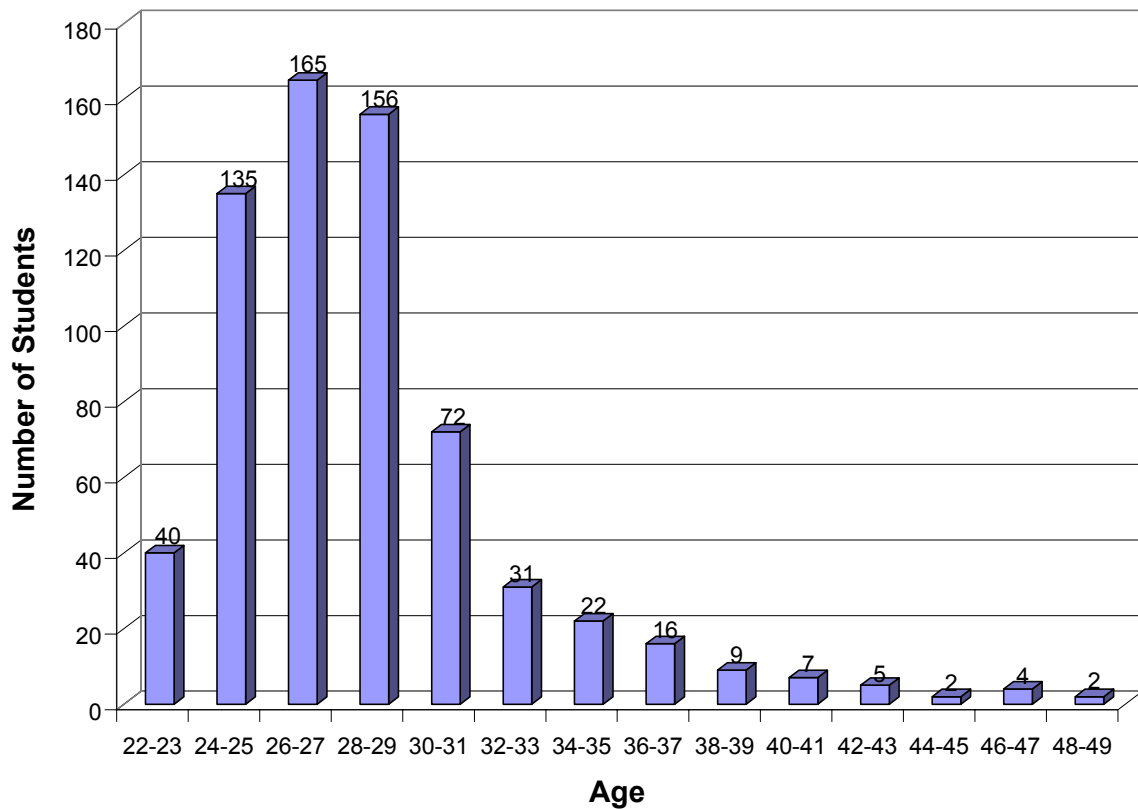
Table 14: Number of Students by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	170 Hour Rule Students		UTD Undergraduates	
	Number of Students	Percentage of Total	Number of Students	Percentage of Total
Anglo	356	53.5%	3482	63.5%
African-American	33	5.0%	329	6.0%
Hispanic	61	9.2%	438	8.0%
Asian	198	29.3%	1019	18.6%
Native American	0	0.0%	41	0.7%
International	18	2.7%	175	3.2%
Total	666	100%	5484	100%

- **Age**

Figure 6 presents data on the age distribution of the 170-hour at-risk students. Their age distribution is, as should be expected, older than that of the undergraduate population. The age differential implies, however, that many of these students have spent time in the labor force, and are in effect stop-out students who, as a result of their life course, altered their career goals. Note that 496 of the 666 students, or 74%, are less than 30 years old.

Figure 6: Number of Students by Age



Changes to the 170-Hour Rule

On February 15th, 1999, the Committee on Education approved certain changes to the 170-Hour legislation. The major changes were:

- changing the limit from 170 hours to 45 hours over the amount required for a student's current degree plan,
- adding a "grandfather clause" so this rule will not affect any student initially enrolled before Fall of 1999,
- and adding Section 2, sub-section E, which states that the legislature still may not fund hours earned by students that are "exempt" under the "grandfather clause," even though they just added that exemption.

The hour limit for most of UTD's degree plans actually decreases under this modified rule, so it now affects even more students. Any degree plan that requires 120 hours to graduate becomes a 165-hour limit. Table 15 shows the effects of these changes. First, note that the number of affected students increases by almost 11% as an effect of these changes. It is unclear from the legislation what the effect of these students exceeding the limit will actually be at this time. These students may be declared exempt, but whether the schools will receive funding for the hours these "exempt" students take, is unknown. Table 15 also shows that some majors, especially the sciences, have a range of possible hour limits. This stems from the fact that these majors offer several options for degrees and concentrations in that major. To determine the number of students affected in those majors, the highest value in the range was used. This means that these numbers are the minimum numbers of students affected. The actual number may be much higher.

Table 15: Change in Number of Students Affected

Major	STUDENTS Over 170 Funded Hours	Hour Limit for Each Degree Plan	STUDENTS Over +45 Funded Hours
Arts & Humanities			
AP	4	165	5
HS	6	165	6
LIT	15	165	20
Engineering and Computer Science			
CS	80	166	87
EE	41	175	37
General Studies			
AMS	1	165	1
IS	28	165	31
Human Development			
NSC	3	165	4
PSY	14	165	16
SPA	5	165	7
Management			
ACC	14	165	16
BA	60	165	74
Natural Science and Mathematics			
BIO	26	171-174	24
CHM	4	168-169	5
GEO	4	171-175	4
MATH	5	165	6
PHY	3	169-172	3
STAT	4	165	4
Social Sciences			
ECO	14	165	17
GVT	7	165	7
PA	2	165	2
SOC	3	165	5
Undergraduate Studies			
UGS	11	165	11
Total	354		392

Concluding Observations

First, it appears that the vast majority of students at risk came to UT Dallas with excessive hours that were attempted at multiple institutions, most often area community colleges. Once at the university most of these students appear to be making progress toward their degrees within normal parameters. They are much more likely to be male, older, working, attending part-time, and to have conflicting demands on their time. Asian-Americans and Hispanics are over represented in the at-risk population; data suggest that these may be first generation college students. The recent changes in the legislation do not change these factors. Students who take large numbers of hours at community colleges or change their majors late in their academic careers will still be affected by this rule. The changes only cause more people to be snared by this rule. Regardless of when the rule goes into effect, the university will, in the future, have to identify these students early in their matriculation and find a mechanism to aid them in efficiently reaching graduation.