

U.S. colleges becoming more home-school friendly

By Ana Beatriz Cholo

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LOS ANGELES – David Sample wanted to attend the university of California at Riverside but thought it was a lost cause because he had been home schooled.

The University of California system is known for being tough on nontraditionally schooled applicants. For them, the best ticket to UC has been transferring after taking community college classes or posting near-perfect scores on college entrance exams.

“For home schoolers, it was basically a shut door for us because of the restrictions,” Sample said.

Last fall, however, UC Riverside joined a growing number of colleges around the country that are revamping application policies to accommodate home schooled students.

The change came just in time for the 18-year-old Sample to apply and get accepted with a substantial scholarship.

Under UC Riverside’s new policy, home schoolers can apply by submitting a lengthy portfolio detailing their studies and other educational experiences. Sample’s package showed he had studied chemistry, U.S. history and geometry, rewired a house and helped rebuild a medical clinic in Nicaragua.

The U.S. Department of Education reports that 1.1 million, or 2.2 percent of all students in the nation, are home schooled.

In 2006 Utah had over 8,500 home-schooled students, up nearly 1,000 students from the year before. Davis School District has the highest number of home-schooled students followed by Jordan.

Yon Yarrington, president of Utah Home Education Association, has homeschooled his four children. His oldest daughter, who is now starting her master’s degree, did not have a diploma going into college, but Yarrington said the admissions process was relatively friendly to home-school students.

“Years ago there was some push back from colleges with home-school students, but anymore you rarely find any problems with admissions – a lot of schools are anxious to get their hands on home schoolers,” Yarrington said.

Some private colleges have eagerly recruited those students for years and tailored application processes to include them. Nationally, home schoolers may still face some challenges when applying to many public universities, but their chances of being considered are improving.

In 2000, 52 percent of all colleges in the country had a formal evaluation policy for applications from home schoolers, said David Hawkins, director of public policy for the National Association for College Admission Counseling.

Four years later, the number jumped to 83 percent. During that time, 45 percent of colleges reported receiving more applications from home schoolers, he said.

At the University of Utah, home-schooled students must meet several criteria for admission, including a transcript that has been certified by the State Board of Education, a composite score of 23 or higher on the ACT and a passing score on the GED of at least 550.

That GED requirement also ensures students are at least 18 years old or that their high school class has graduated, because younger students are not allowed to take the test in Utah, noted Carolyn Dyson, associate director of admissions at the U.

“We’ve found a good success rate with these standards for home schoolers. A lot of our home-schooled students are bright and do very well here,” she said. “But some are just not prepared for the rigor of the classroom, and they’re just not ready for it.”

Dyson said she'd be hesitant to change those standards and is especially opposed to recently proposed legislation that would have allowed home-schooled students to get a high school diploma if they scored within the top 15 percent of students on the ACT.

The measure, which had no age restrictions, failed during this year's legislative session. "If they start giving home-schooled students diplomas, we'll challenge it," she said.