

## Study says academic tracking a major barrier to college attendance

*By Surajit Sen Sharma*

A recent study conducted by the Sen. George Mitchell J. Scholarship Research Institute in Maine found the practice of placing students in high school courses based on their academic performances, or academic tracking, to be a major barrier to college attendance.

The study found that over a period of five years, while the number of high school graduates planning to go to college went up, the actual number of college enrollments dropped. Academic tracking was the chief factor that kept students from going to college.

The study was conducted at 20 high schools and surveyed more than 3,000 people, including students, parents, and educators. It found that the number of high school graduates who wanted to attend college rose from 64% to 70% from 2001 to 2005, but the actual rate of college enrollment in the same period dropped from 62% to 57%.

Academic tracking was named the chief reason for the below-average rate of college graduation in Maine, which has an above-average rate of graduation from high school. The report said, "The data clearly show that students in a general/vocational track are less challenged in the classroom, receive less encouragement about college, and do not feel as well-prepared for life after high school. . ."

The study supports the reservations toward academic tracking expressed by the National Education Association Executive Committee/Subcommittee on Academic Tracking in June of 1990. The NEA report clearly stated, "Tracking's most controversial feature is the potentially harmful effects of bad placement decisions . . ."

Maine's Department of Education has begun drafting a legislative proposal to end the practice of academic tracking by 2010.