



Examining the Factors that Influence Students Advanced Placement Enrollment at

TOHS
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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the influences parents, school faculty, peers, and self-motivation have on high school students when enrolling in Advanced Placement (AP) courses at Thousand Oaks High School (TOHS).

The objectives within this research pertained to determining why students enroll in AP classes as well as determining if there were any discrepancies among different groupings of students in terms of the reasons as to why they enrolled in AP classes.

The findings of this study took into consideration students of varying backgrounds and addresses possible barriers that certain students may face as well as provides possible solutions to overcoming the barriers identified. The results reveal that the most influential group to enroll in AP classes was a students' peers, however, self-motivation also played a large role in enrolling in AP classes.

INTRODUCTION

Education is an important part of today's society as it helps shape young minds to become intelligent building blocks of the community. Acknowledging the increasing competition to get accepted into and receive an education at an institute of higher learning and a decline in jobs offered for people with the equivalent to a high school diploma or less, exhibits the increasing importance of receiving a college level education. Therefore, students at a high school level may feel inclined to create a more challenging schedule, both inside and outside of the classroom. From an academic perspective, students may feel the need to participate in Advanced Placement (AP) courses. However, there may be other reasons as to why students desire to take AP courses aside from those pertaining to higher education.

Considering that a vast majority of the studies identified within the literature review focused on influential factors revolving around students facing some kind of barrier, attending a high school with a poor economic climate or large minority populations as well as substandard counselors and educators, this study aims to identify the influential reasons as to why students are taking AP courses without necessarily facing the same barriers or experiencing them to as great of an extent. TOHS is a large suburban, upper-middle class, with a large Caucasian population, high school in Southern California. The results of this study may be limited in the types of high schools it may be applied to, however, the results may hold a greater significance to schools with a similar background as TOHS.

The main objectives within this research were: to identify why students at TOHS are taking AP classes and to determine if there is a discrepancy among various groups of students as to why they enrolled in AP courses. Furthermore, as a secondary purpose for this research, this study aims to determine if the ethnic demographic of the entirety of TOHS is similar to the ethnic demographic found within the AP classrooms at TOHS.

METHODS

In order to accurately identify the factors influencing a student's decision to participate in AP classes, only upperclassman, meaning juniors and seniors, taking one or more AP courses were surveyed. As long as the student was taking an AP class at Thousand Oaks High School they were welcome to answer the survey, no AP student was purposefully excluded.

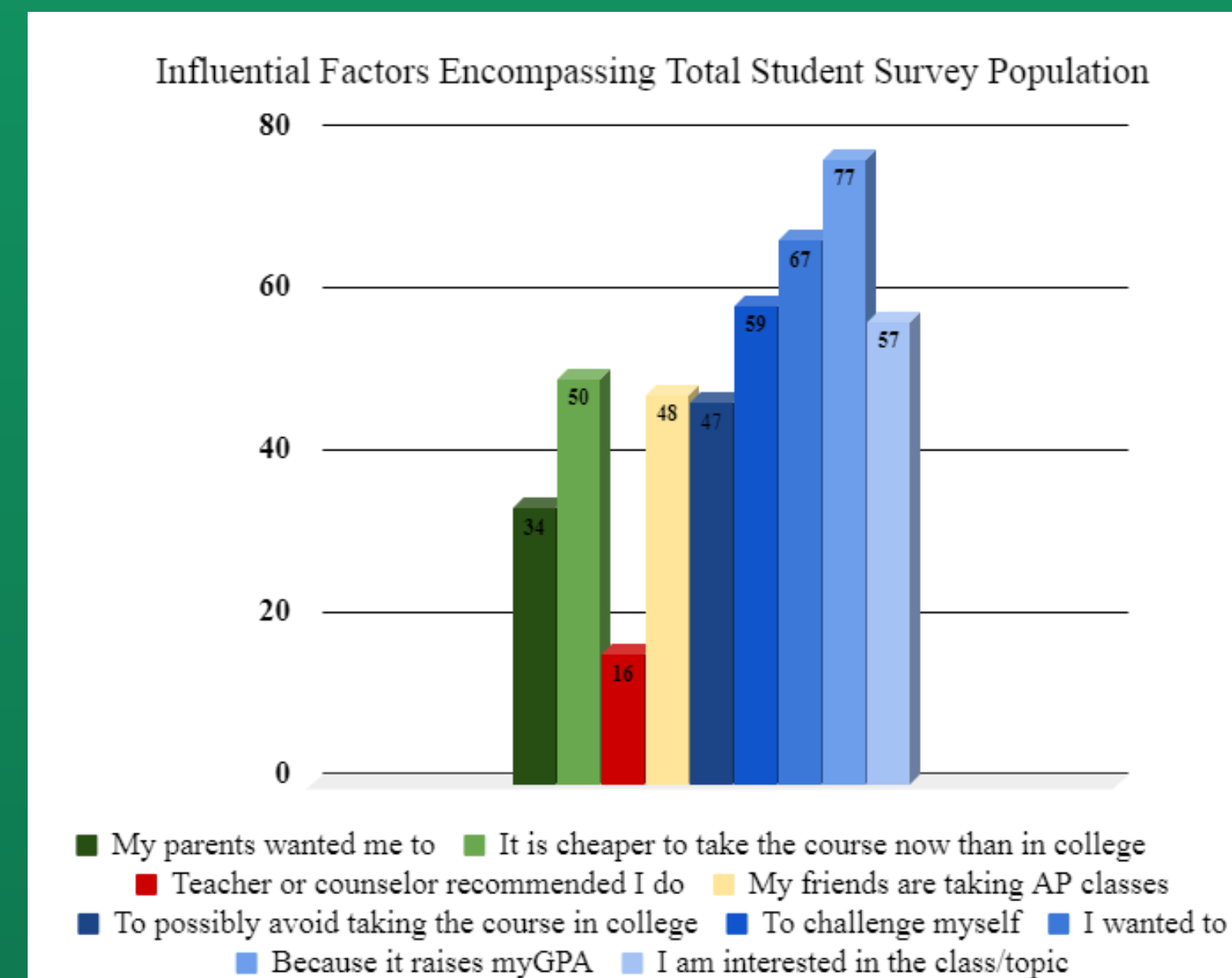
To efficiently collect data, only students taking an AP class during second period, out of a typical seven period day, had the ability to partake in this study. Since the most AP classes took place during both second and third period, these two time frames were considered for conducting this survey, however, second period was selected due to the greater variety in types of AP classes that were offered.

A student's participation was contingent on whether or not their second period AP teacher was willing to dispense the survey to their students, if a teacher did not wish for their class to participate in the study, those students were excluded from the survey.

RESULTS

Out of ninety participants, 50% were male, 50% were female and 41% of participants were juniors while the other 59% were seniors. The greater percentage of senior responses was expected since seniors have a broader amount of subjects available to them when selecting their courses than juniors do.

When students were asked why they were taking AP classes at TOHS (see Figure below), they were provided with a variety of generic responses. Participants had the ability to select all answers that applied. Within the figure below, the responses students selected imply that each option was taken into consideration when these students chose to enroll in AP classes. Within the data, almost every students response contained two or more of the options listed in the legend above, students who only selected one option identified more self-motivating reasons to explain why they are taking AP classes such as "to challenge myself" and "I am interested in the class/topic".



CONCLUSIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

This project intended on discovering the factors that influence students in enrolling in AP courses through identifying pre-existing factors found among other high schools through scholarly works and applying them to TOHS.

Separating different types of students allowed this study to identify the most influential factors found in specific groups of students. Although results remained consistent throughout each grouping, the information gathered displays routes in which TOHS can target certain students to encourage AP enrollment. Namely, identifying possible courses of action, such as encouraging students to rely on their counselors to a greater extent when need be, in which minority populations can be encouraged to enroll in AP courses in hopes of minimizing the gap between the ethnic demographic of TOHS and that of the AP classrooms at TOHS.

DISCUSSION

The main objective of this study was to discover the factors that encourage students to enroll in AP classes and to identify the possible differences between varying groups of students enrolled in AP classes. The responses that students selected when they were questioned as to why they were taking AP classes were separated into four groups: parental influences, faculty influences, peer influences, and self-motivation. In order for each group to be considered an influential factor, all responses that fall under the category must be greater than 50% to ensure that the majority experienced these influences.

To discover if there was a distinct variation of influences depending on the type of student, participants were separated into groups based on their ethnicity and grade level. As a comparison between the results as a whole and the two groups identified above, it is important to acknowledge that the most influential factors for the entire sample size were peer influences and self-motivation.

For students of a Caucasian background, the most prominent factors fell under peer influences and self-motivation, for students that were categorized as a minority, the findings showed that the most influential reason students were taking AP classes was self-motivation. For juniors, the most common group was self-motivation, for seniors, the most common groups were self-motivation and peer influences.

Beyond comparing the factors that influence a student's choice to take AP classes at TOHS in various groupings, a secondary inquiry of this study was to determine possible reasons as to why students selected the factors they did within the initial inquiry of the study. In order to discover this, each factor identified in the survey took into consideration various responses from other questions within the survey to see if there were any common traits among students who identified the same factor.

Students taking AP classes for self-motivational purposes do not consider AP work to be as intolerable as the total student survey population does.

Under peer influences all report that their friends take AP classes to some extent, along with an approximately ten percent increase for the response "mainly AP classes" between the entire survey population and this selection.

Participants from faculty influences were more likely to visit their school counselor multiple times in a semester.

Under parental influences

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