Life Trajectories of PAUSD Alumni Based on College Tier Attended

By: Meghna Singh
About Me!

- Junior at Gunn High School
- President of Reach Out Care Know (ROCK) club, Wellness Commissioner at Gunn, Peer Leader of Sources of Strength
- Advanced Authentic Research (AAR) project
Rationale

- *Life Trajectories of PAUSD Alumni Based On College Tier Attended*

- Students and parents believe attending top tier level schools will correlate to a “successful future”

- Great pressure placed on students about which college they attend
  - Intense preparation (AP/honors classes, SAT/ACT, extracurricular activities, volunteering)

- Direct data from PAUSD graduates
Methodology

- Created Online survey
- 32 questions (single/multiple answer, open response)
- PAUSD Graduates: 2004-2014
- Distributed via public Facebook pages, Palo Alto community websites/newsletters (CHC & PSN), direct emails, word of mouth
- December 2016 - February 2017
Sample Size

- Total: 618 responses

Which high school did you attend in Palo Alto?

- Gunn High School: 37%
- Palo Alto High School: 62.1%
- Transfer from Paly to Gunn: 11.6%
- Transfer from Gunn to Paly: 12.9%

Graduation Year Of PAUSD Alumni

- 2004: 13.4%
- 2005: 11.9%
- 2006: 10.3%
- 2007: 11.6%
- 2008: 8.3%
- 2009: 12.9%
- 2010: 4.9%
- 2011: 8.5%
- 2012: 6.4%
- 2013: 8.5%
- 2014: 11.6%
High School Measure of Success

#1: Getting into a top 20 school

Followed by:
- Developing interests
- Being happy
- High GPA
College Measure of Success

#1: Developing interests
#2: Being happy
#3: High GPA
#4: Getting a job
How Well Prepared For College

93% Prepared For College Level Courses
- Yes: 92.7%
- No: 7.3%

72% Socially/Emotionally Ready To Attend College
- Yes: 72.2%
- No: 27.8%
College Years

- **89%** were satisfied with college choice
- **38%** changed their major
- **9.1%** took a gap year post high school
  - study abroad, develop personal interests, needed therapy, college was too expensive, parents were sick
- **18.8%** transferred out/took a break from college
  - closer to family, got expelled, flunked out, depression/eating disorders, not a good fit school, too expensive
Biggest Impact on Current Career

#1: Major
#2: Connections
#3: Internships

★Bottom two:  
- College attended
- HS GPA
Breaking It Down By Tier Levels!

● **618** responses total

● Attended **183** different colleges/universities

● Assigned each school a tier level based on United States News & World Report (USNWR) college rankings 2017

*Please note that I created the following set of tier levels.*
## Tier Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier</th>
<th>USNWR Ranking</th>
<th>Examples of Schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>University, Liberal Arts College 1-20</td>
<td>Harvard, Stanford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>University, Liberal Arts College 21-50</td>
<td>USC, University of Michigan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>University, Liberal Arts College 51-100</td>
<td>Pepperdine, Purdue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>University, Liberal Arts College 100+</td>
<td>University of Oregon, University of SF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Regional University/College, Arts, Business</td>
<td>Santa Clara University, High Point University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Community College, City College, International, Unranked</td>
<td>Foothill College, Santa Barbara City College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Unclear, No Response</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Number of Responses per Tier Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier Level</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tier 1</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tier 2</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tier 3</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tier 4</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tier 5</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tier 6</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tier 7</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Career Paths and Professions By Tier Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier</th>
<th>Medical, Life Sciences, Public Health</th>
<th>Business, Econ, Banking, Finance</th>
<th>Engineering, Tech</th>
<th>Lib Arts, Social Sciences, Politics, Policy</th>
<th>Visual Performin g Arts</th>
<th>Law</th>
<th>Educati on</th>
<th>Hospitali ty</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>Military</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>Real Estate, Prop Mngt, Journ/Media, Apparel Industry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>Environmental Policy, Journalism/Media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>Pilot, Homemaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Cosmetology, Firefighter, Gunsmith, Military, Prof Football</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>Firefighter, Real Estate, Prop Mngt, Urban Plan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Income Results by Tier Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier</th>
<th>In College/Pursuing Higher Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Quality of Life Satisfaction Levels
Relationship Satisfaction Levels

![Bar chart showing satisfaction levels across different tiers.]
Income Satisfaction Levels

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Somewhat Unsatisfied
- Unsatisfied
- Very Unsatisfied
- No Source of Income

Tiers:
- Tier 1
- Tier 2
- Tier 3
- Tier 4
- Tier 5
- Tier 6
Mental Health Conditions

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Feeling Burnt Out
- Needing/Seeking out counseling
- I did not develop

*Alumni were able to select all conditions that apply*
Mental Health Conditions HS vs. College

Chart showing the percentage of students in different tiers experiencing mental health conditions in High School (purple bars) and College (orange bars). The chart compares Tier 1 to Tier 6, with the highest percentage in Tier 6 for both High School and College.
## Percentage Change of MH Conditions HS to College by Condition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tier 1</th>
<th>Tier 2</th>
<th>Tier 3</th>
<th>Tier 4</th>
<th>Tier 5</th>
<th>Tier 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developed</td>
<td>+3%</td>
<td>+3%</td>
<td>+3%</td>
<td>-15%</td>
<td>-4%</td>
<td>-23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>+1%</td>
<td>-2%</td>
<td>-10%</td>
<td>-13%</td>
<td>+1%</td>
<td>-5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>-2%</td>
<td>-4%</td>
<td>-7%</td>
<td>-21%</td>
<td>-5%</td>
<td>-8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burnt Out</td>
<td>+28%</td>
<td>-5%</td>
<td>-15%</td>
<td>-6%</td>
<td>+1%</td>
<td>-6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling</td>
<td>+9%</td>
<td>+2%</td>
<td>-1%</td>
<td>-26%</td>
<td>+1%</td>
<td>-40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 31:
What advice would you give to current high school students and their families in Palo Alto, given the recent tragedies, media coverage and the academic environment?
Underlying Themes

- Do what you love & what makes you happy
- Don’t hesitate to ask for help/seek help
- Don’t be scared of failure
- Define success for yourself
- Learn because you want to, not for a grade
- Find trustworthy friends
- Know your limits
- Self care/take time for yourself
“Going to a top 20 college doesn’t matter. Going to the college that you love does.”

2014, Gunn High School Graduate
“The student can not reach their full academic potential without strong emotional support. Seeking it should be as prioritized as seeking a tutor.”
“Just keep going. There are people who love you so, so much. Suicide doesn’t cure depression, it just transfers that sadness to the people who love you the most.”
“Your GPA matters less than having dinner with your family.”
“Hold on.”
“Control what you can for now and understand that your path does not have to be perfect to arrive at your destination.”

2007, Gunn High School Graduate
“I know it is difficult not to be influenced by society, especially growing up in the Silicon Valley, but do not let society, your peers, or even family members decide what ‘success’ means for you. You define your own success and happiness.”
“While some people’s path will be straight, as the years go on you will find that everyone takes a detour. If you do so earlier in life, you will have much more life experience and maturity than your colleagues.”

2007, Gunn High School Graduate
“Giving a kid time to explore the world, develop interests on their own, and maybe once in a while get in trouble, allows that person to understand the world in a way that a classroom, or a private lesson, will never teach.”

2006, Gunn High School Graduate
“Don’t believe that sacrificing happiness now will make you happier later. And don’t believe that making a ton of money will make you happy, either.”
“Do what’s best for you, not what’s best for others’ perception of you.”
“The name and prestige of a school is not what makes one successful, it is the work one puts in, the love one has for what one is studying, and the opportunities one seeks out that leads to success.”

2009, Gunn High School Graduate
Thank you!