

# **Post Secondary Enrollment Options: Who Participates and Who Does Not**

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## **Introduction**

The passage of Senate Bill 140 (1989) by the Ohio Legislature allowed for high school students to concurrently enroll at Ohio colleges and universities while they attend high school called in Ohio, Post Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEOP). From the first year, when 593 students participated to fiscal year 2002 when 8544 students were enrolled, the number of participants has burgeoned. Yet in Ohio, one might be surprised that the number isn't higher.

Because of the many perceived benefits of PSEOP, including access to advanced course material, laboratory usage and a reduced cost of higher education, many are puzzled as to why many gifted students do not participate. Speculation includes: a student's high satisfaction with high school courses, participation in extracurricular activities, social structures in the high school, inadequate advising so that students are unaware of their options, and logistical difficulties associated with attending college classes. Some counselors and administrators have made the claim that top tier students do not generally take advantage of PSEOP and only those students who are less gifted tend to take advantage. If such is the case, it is also possible to infer that students who participate may be greater risk takers and who might have lower grade point averages due to a more demanding course load.

This latter speculation formed the genesis for this study. The authors decided to survey participating and nonparticipating students (all of whom were labeled gifted and talented under Ohio Rules). The survey consisted of five parts: Part One included general demographic information including grade, gender, and grade point average and their feelings toward their school experiences; Part Two included a list of course types taken in the past and present such as AP and honors classes as well as different service deliveries, i.e.: pull-out programs, summer camps, special experiences; Part Three asked for reasons why students chose the options they did (or did not) for participating in PSEOP; Part Four asked students to identify extra-curricular activities, jobs, volunteering and other responsibilities they had; and Part Five provided an open-ended response concerning PSEOP and other advanced offerings.

### **Post-Secondary Options in Ohio**

In Ohio, Chapter 3365 of the Ohio Revised Code defines concurrent enrollment. Referred to Post-Secondary Enrollment, Section 3365.02 (1999) establishes the PSEOP program for secondary students. Enrollment at a college or university may be full or part time to complete nonsectarian courses for high school and/or college credit. Information regarding PSEOP must be made available to students in grades eight through eleven prior to March 1<sup>st</sup> of the proceeding year of expected enrollment. School districts are also required to counsel students and parents about the risks and consequences of participation, including limited funds resulting in limited participation (3365.021). Students and parents are also counseled on the two enrollment options (3365.04). Careful consideration must be made. A student may choose Option A: upon successful completion of college coursework, the student receives college credit. The completed

coursework grade is not included in the student's high school grade point average. The student is solely responsible for all tuition, textbooks, fees and materials associated with the coursework. However, if a student chooses Option B, upon successful completion of coursework, the grade is entered into their high school grade point average as well as gaining college credit. The student is not responsible for tuition, textbooks, fees or materials associated with the coursework. The school district reimburses the college or university for the student's enrollment.

### **Sample and Procedures**

A pilot study was conducted during the 2000-2001 academic year. Eight school districts participated. The coordinator of gifted programs was asked to randomly select five students who were identified as gifted and participating in PSEOP and five students who were also identified that were not participating. The return rate for this pilot study was 57.5% (46 surveys).

In this current study, coordinators of gifted programs and guidance counselors from across the state were asked to participate. Upon agreement, they were sent ten packets containing a cover letter, survey and postage paid return envelope. Coordinators with less than ten potential respondents were asked to notify the investigators the number that was distributed so an estimate of a return rate could be calculated. The cover letter explained the purpose of the study and provided assurance that they could refuse participation without penalty. Should they wish to participate, the students were assured complete anonymity in their responses. The surveys were to be randomly distributed to five juniors and/or seniors identified as gifted who were participating in PSEOP. The remaining surveys were to be randomly distributed to juniors and/or seniors identified as

gifted who were not participating in PSEOP. One change was made to the survey from the pilot study. A question was added asking students to identify any participation in extracurricular activities in the arts or music.

## **Results**

257 surveys were returned. Because it is difficult to precisely determine the number of surveys actually distributed a return rate can only be estimated (approximately 31% of the number of survey supplied to coordinators. for a rate of [yet to be figured-per Tom]. The mean age of the respondents was 17.22 years. One hundred respondents were male and one fifty-two were female. Five did not report any data. 27% (52) of respondents lived in northwest Ohio, 31% (60) were from northeast Ohio, 24% (47) resided in southwest Ohio, 8% (16) hailed from southeast Ohio and 9% (18) called Franklin County home.

One hundred fifty-five students reported having a part time job. One hundred and one were not employed. Fifty-one students reported holding a student government office while two hundred and three did not. One hundred and eighty-one students reported that they participated in community service projects during the school year. Seventy-five reported that they did not participate in such projects. One hundred and fifty-four students said they participated in interscholastic sports while one hundred and two said they did not. One hundred and forty-seven students participated in fine arts extracurricular programs, however one hundred and nine did not. Lastly, one hundred and twenty-seven students are participating in PSEOP. One hundred and twenty-nine students are not participating in PSEOP.

The speculation that a second tier of gifted students (ones less successful in high school) was not borne out in the data. No statistical significance was found between the participating students and nonparticipating students. In fact, the mean rank of participating students was actually higher. What did differentiate the groups was satisfaction with the school's curriculum. Significant differences were observed for satisfaction with the school's curriculum, the degree of involvement participants felt in their school, how well they liked school, and how well school met their academic needs. Clearly, those who participate in PSEOP do so because they perceive their high schools do not meet their academic needs.

Other findings included no differences in the amount of extracurricular activities, music and fine arts participation, sports participation, or hours of employment. Additionally, the results revealed that students engaged in PSEOP also had in the past or currently were participating in other gifted programs in the past including Internships, Advanced Placement and honors courses.

#### Reasons for Participation:

Most students cited saving money in their college education (N=88) as the primary reason but a significant number of students indicated that they sought access to coursework not available in their schools (N=85). Other reasons included enhancing applications to selective colleges, getting out of college sooner, and access to faster pacing of instruction.

#### Barriers to Participation:

Students also encountered barriers to participation. The most frequently cited was lack of cooperation by the high school. Other impediments noted were scheduling,

driving and parking, availability of courses, and cooperation of the institution of higher education. Nonparticipants cited similar concerns but noted the high school cooperation less frequently.

## **Conclusions**

Clearly students who participate in PSEOP are not different in achievement or recognition than their peers who do not choose to participate. Participants consistently expressed dissatisfaction with the curriculum, challenge and pacing in their high school. They also perceived postsecondary courses as yielding benefits giving them a leg up in college, advantage in applying to selective universities, preparing them for college coursework, and providing access to advanced coursework sooner at the college level. One other point that emerged is that many of these students are engaged in multiple accelerative options simultaneously. This would undoubtedly have implications for planning and documenting student status and for counseling the student in academic and career options. It is unclear the extent to which school districts are aware of or take responsibility for it. Nonparticipants do not perceive the same inadequacies in their school's curriculum.

It is possible to presume that some of the disruptive effects some counselors and administrators report due to large-scale participation in PSEOP is in one sense self-inflicted. Schools that have limited course offerings, slow pacing of instruction, and a lack of options for their gifted students is most at risk to lose enrollment to PSEOP. Schools with richer offerings may retain students in their curriculum longer and with students expressing more satisfaction. Some may assert that the high school curriculum is less at fault than we have painted here and that students are solely pursuing college

credit for economic and status related reasons. This does not supported by data that shows, despite a general increase in credit by examination options, students are selecting PSEOP in steadily increasing numbers. The teaching and coursework available seem to be the primary concerns for students. For high schools concerned about the loss of enrollment, it should be as well.