ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to better understand why students chose the high school courses that they do. The school in question has multiple curriculum and the students can choose whatever option they desire. However, at this time, the school does little work to understand the students’ reasoning for their choices. Krumboltz’s (2008) social learning theory was used to help frame this study. Krumboltz (2008) used this theory to address, “The interaction of social and cultural factors on decision-making and acknowledges that they become enmeshed in an individual’s identity, as life develops and experiences are accumulated” (Hodkinson & Sparks, p. 32, 1997). A general qualitative research design was utilized as the methodology of choice as it captures the lived experience of how things work (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014) and seeks to capture individual experiences rather than measuring generalizable outcomes within groups. By interviewing ten students, the researcher was able to provide recommendations for practice based upon the analysis of the transcribed interviews.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate high school students’ shared experiences of selecting their courses for school. Knowledge gained from this study can inform administrators at the studied school, called School XYZ to preserve anonymity, about whether their current practices and policies have been adequately preparing their students for future university study. Because this study focused on how students made sense of a shared experience, a qualitative research design was employed to explore that phenomenon.

An overview of the context and background of the problem of practice will begin this chapter. This will be followed by a discussion of the rationale and significance of the study, the research problem, statement of purpose, and the research question. After this, terminology used in this study that may be unfamiliar to the reader will be defined. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of Krumboltz’s (2008) social learning theory, which provides the lens through which this investigation will be conducted.

Context and Background

This study focused on the students at School XYZ, which is an independent, nonselective international high school near London, England. International schools defy a single definition (Hayden, 2006) because of variations in location, student body nationalities, and types of curricula around the world. Matthews (2004, cited in Hayden, 2006) categorized these schools on a spectrum, ranging from those based on an educational ideology to those that were market driven. The schools’ missions respond to the needs of expatriate communities in the host country. School XYZ leans toward the market-driven category, as its standard curriculum is American, although the more internationally focused International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Program (IBO, 2014) has grown in popularity. Moreover, the once dominant American student
population has diminished. At School XYZ, students choose their courses in one of three programs: Advanced Placement (AP), IB Diploma, or the American High School Diploma. These choices, which will be the emphasis of this study, presumably are made with further study at the university level in mind. While School XYZ’s website notes that there are information evenings for the students and families that detail the differences between the programs, the school’s administration does not follow up with the students to determine why they made their curriculum choices.

Regardless of their choice of curriculum, graduates can generally gain entrance to universities around the world, because university entrance requirements are based more on student performance than on the curriculum offered (Conley, 2007). Entire countries or even specific universities may have different levels of familiarity with the various curricula offered at international schools around the world (Conley, 2007). This may be related to the number of secondary schools that offer each curriculum. For example, even though the AP Program has been in existence since the late 1950s, School XYZ is one of only three international schools that offer that program in the United Kingdom (UK). In comparison, School XYZ is one of 125 schools that offer the IB Program in the UK (IBO, 2014).

While universities evaluate the rigor of the curriculum that a student takes in high school as part of the admissions process, the benefits of a student’s participation in an advanced high school curriculum do not stop there (Conley, 2007). As Geiser and Santelices noted, “The original intent of the Advanced Placement (AP) Program was to provide students the opportunity to take college-level coursework and earn college credit while still in high school” (2006, p. 75). This policy remains true at many universities in the United States and it has since expanded to include other advanced curricula, including the IB Program (Conley, 2007).
According to the National Association of College Admission Counseling (NACAC), “In recent years, the perceived increase in competition for spots at [American] colleges and universities has garnered much media attention and fueled a great deal of anxiety among students, parents and counselors” (NACAC, 2008, p. 20). The rationale for this study was the researcher’s interest in students’ university placements. As a college counselor at an international school in England, the researcher works with students on their journey from choosing courses in high school until their eventual hoped-for placement into a university. At the high school where the researcher works, students can choose which curriculum they will follow. All students graduate with an American high school diploma; however, they can pursue additional higher-level coursework in the form of AP and IB classes.

The high school that is the research site is non-selective. This means that any student can attend the school as long as he or she meets the minimum-required English language ability. Therefore the academic ability of the student population is diverse. Regardless of their ability, students are given the opportunity to pursue the curriculum of their choice.

Figure 1, taken from the School XYZ website, is an example of a course flow chart that students receive to help them understand how course selections in one grade affect future course choices that they may make. For example, if a student wants to take IB Higher Level Math in Grade 12, than she or he must begin thinking about this course as early as the fifth grade. One may safely assume that is not a typical decision for someone so young.
Figure 1. Example of course progression. This figure illustrates the course progression of mathematics at School XYZ.

Rationale and Significance

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate high school students’ shared experiences of selecting their courses for school. As Yale University has noted, “Many high school sophomores and juniors (and their parents) want to know what courses to take to improve their chances for [college] admission” (2016, para. 2).

In recent years, U.S. public universities have been legally required to set uniform policies for recognizing IB, AP, and dual-enrollment courses (Adams, 2014). In addition, students and families are aware of the benefits of higher education. For example, The College Board (2016a, 2016b), an organization comprising over 4,700 schools, colleges, and universities, reported, “Higher levels of education are associated with higher earnings and that college is a prerequisite
for a comfortable middle-class lifestyle” (Baum & Payea, 2004, p. 20). School XYZ is an affluent school with tuition and fees of up to £27,000/year, therefore, one may assume that students and families will want future financial success to result from the students’ education.

**Research Problem and Research Question**

The issue that narrowed the research being conducted was the increasingly competitive nature of university admissions. James (2007) stated, “Worldwide there has been massive, sometimes staggering, growth in higher education participation in the last 50 years, including in most developing nations” (p. 20). This fact, coupled with the decreasing number of American high school graduates about to attend university (Wong, 2016), has increased the competition for overseas students. The students at School XYZ have become a targeted market for admissions offices because the school is located in England. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate high school students’ shared experiences of selecting their courses for school. The research question that this study sought to answer was “How do Class of 2017 high school graduates of School XYZ make sense of their shared experience of selecting high school courses?”

**Definition of Key Terminology**

Many of the terms used in this study will be familiar to people who are well versed in university admissions or education at the high school and university level. However, some terms may be less well-known, especially because this study touches on policies and procedures that span geographic boundaries. The following definitions are provided to help alleviate any confusion with terminology.
Clearing. Clearing is the process through which students in the UK who have not earned the minimum grades needed to apply to a university may later apply to universities that have unfilled places (University College Admission System [UCAS], 2016).

College vs. university. The terms college and university are used interchangeably in the United States. This study will do so as well, even though the students being interviewed are at a location that typically uses the term university to describe bachelors-degree granting institutions (UCAS, 2016).

Foundation course. A foundation course is a preparatory course common in the United Kingdom. It is the typical process of entry for arts courses, but it is also used for many other courses when students do not meet the requirements for direct entry into a full degree program (UCAS, 2016).

Russell Group. The Russell Group is an association of 24 public research universities in the UK. It is headquartered in London and was established in 1994 to represent its members’ interests, principally to government and parliament (UCAS, 2016).

Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). The TOEFL is a standardized exam that tests the English language proficiency of non-native English speakers who want to enroll in U.S. universities. Many English-speaking academic and professional institutions accept scores from this test. TOEFL is one of the two major English-language tests in the world; the other is the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) (Educational Testing Service, 2016).

University College Admission System (UCAS). The UCAS structures a centralized admissions system for universities in the United Kingdom (UCAS, 2016).

Theoretical Framework
Krumboltz’s (2008) social learning theory helped frame this study. Krumboltz (2008) used this theory to address “The interaction of social and cultural factors on decision-making and acknowledges that they become enmeshed in an individual’s identity, as life develops and experiences are accumulated” (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997, p. 32). This theory seeks to explain how educational skills and preferences are acquired and how course selections are made (Krumboltz, 2008). This theory aligned with the research question because the students at the school perceive that their choice of curricula may influence university placement. This lens also aligned to the methodology chosen for this study, qualitative research, which measures individual lived experiences and relates them within the context of a group (J. A. Smith, 2011).

**Critics of the theoretical framework.** The major criticism of Krumboltz’s (2008) social learning theory is its lack of categorization, both of the stages and behaviors involved in self-evaluation (Walsh & Osipow, 1988). Despite this apparent lack of categorization, Krumboltz’s (2008) theory is one of the few that points out specific behaviors that may contribute to different career outcomes (Walsh & Osipow, 1988). This description of the different learning experiences that shape individuals’ skills and interests is a particular strength of Krumboltz’s (2008) theory.

This strength makes it more applicable than Super’s (1953) self-concept theory, which does not describe these specific factors but rather discusses the influence of role-playing. Super’s (1953) self-concept theory established the idea that self-concept changes with experience over time, and a person’s career development changes along with it. Self-concept develops as individuals role-play different career scenarios (Super, 1953). Krumboltz’s (2008) social learning theory favors the influence of positive and negative reinforcement over the concept of role-playing (Walsh & Osipow, 1988). Krumboltz’s (2008) theory seems more nuanced, at least over Super’s (1953) theory, because Super does not break down the stages of learning according to age (Walsh &
Osipow, 1988). These labels may not only oversimplify learning experiences at different ages, but they may also be useful, as in Super’s (1953) theory (Walsh & Osipow, 1988).

The more nuanced nature of Krumboltz’s (2008) theory is also apparent when it is compared to Holland’s hexagon theory (Career Key, 1987). Holland’s hexagon is so named because of its categorization of human personalities into six sections: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional (Career Key, 1987). Social learning theory can explain how people develop combinations of the six points of Holland’s hexagon, something that Holland’s theory itself fails to do (Career Key, 1987). The many stereotypes that people use when describing their profession in Holland’s hexagon studies can be explained better by social learning theory than by the hexagon (Career Key, 1987). Social learning theory also specifies behaviors and characteristics of self-evaluation, which Holland considered within a far broader general assessment of self (Walsh & Osipow, 1988). However, Krumboltz’s (2008) proclivity for emphasizing the dichotomy between internal and external factors (e.g., self-evaluation and social reinforcement) is contrary to what data shows regarding the legitimacy of separating these two factors (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). The internal and external factors in decision-making are one and the same. In other words, external factors are part of the decision making process, rather than being just consequential (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997).

Another critique of Kromboltz’s (2008) theory was made by Gottfredson, whose theory of occupational aspirations derives more from a intellectual basis than a depth of understanding (Walsh & Osipow, 1988). Gottfredson believed that compromises made in career decisions followed the same patterns for each individual, with everyone prioritizing the same job aspects over others (Walsh & Osipow, 1988). Conversely, researchers use social learning theory to acknowledge that individuals may prioritize different aspects (Walsh & Osipow, 1988). Hence,
Krumboltz (2008) seemed to rely less on categorization than Gottfredson. This was also apparent in how social learning theory describes learning experiences but does not organize them as Gottfredson did (Walsh & Osipow, 1988).

Krumboltz (2008) acknowledged that this lack of organization was a potential weakness when he revised social learning theory into happenstance theory. Happenstance theory explicates the influence of unplanned events on career choice (Krumboltz, 2008). Krumboltz (2008) admitted that one may improve knowledge of this happenstance theory by understanding that one may classify the unplanned events that are the basis of the theory. Despite the many criticisms of Krumboltz’s (2008) social learning theory, based on its lack of classification of the various factors of learning experiences and the stages during which these experiences occur, the theory’s depth of understanding of the causes and influences of these factors make it an unparalleled theory within education (Walsh & Osipow, 1988).

**Rationale.** The decision to choose Krumboltz’s (2008) social learning theory was mostly based on its emphasis on the need to understand an individual’s experiences in the broader context of a group of students. This study focused on high school students’ shared experience of selecting their courses for school, which is much in line with the learning experiences discussed in social learning theory, even though this study specifically focused on education (Krumboltz, 2008). Although this study focused on the shared experiences, rather than the direct consequences of educational learning experiences, one expects that the two are one and the same – an idea that plays into social learning theory’s emphasis on self-evaluation. This framework, then, was relevant in its focus on self-evaluation and understanding the effect of individual learning experiences within a group (Walsh & Osipow, 1988).
Application of theoretical framework in this study. Just as Krumboltz’s (2008) social learning theory focused on individual experiences, so too did this study. Similar to social learning theory, albeit slightly controversial, are the internal and external (or social) influences of educational learning experiences, which were also examined in this study (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). This study investigated high school students’ shared experience of selecting their courses for school. Moreover, this idea was certainly inspired by social learning theory. This study asked qualitative, rather than quantitative, questions.

Summary

In conclusion, this first chapter established the research question and methodology used to frame this study. In addition, the context and background of the study was explained in order to help the reader understand why this topic is important within the field of education. In the next chapter, a literature review helps frame the research within the existing literature.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate high school students’ shared experiences of selecting their courses for school. This second chapter, a literature review, will address available academic works related to the subject of high school course selection. The research question “How do Class of 2017 high school graduates of School XYZ make sense of their shared experience of selecting high school courses?” and the curriculum available at School XYZ (the Advanced Placement Program and International Baccalaureate Program) form the context for this chapter.

This chapter begins by examining the significance of the two programs that are offered by School XYZ, the Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate Programs. Next, both programs will be introduced more comprehensively and their advantages and disadvantages will be discussed. The chapter will then focus on schools offering the programs and finally will conclude by discussing the influence these programs have on university options for students.

Significance and Historical Introduction

According to Lee (1993), high school students are confronted with a large number of choices when deciding their course of study, and this choice amplifies the social stratification that takes place within education. Lee (1993) stated:

Following a more demanding set of academic courses in high school is strongly and positively associated with higher academic achievement, and less advantaged students are considerably less likely to select such a demanding course of study than are their more academically and socially advantaged counterparts. (p. 125)

Lee (1993) went on to argue that people must look at the possible effects of course choice if they want to encourage educational reforms that would ensure equity among diverse social and racial
groups. Lee’s research aligns with this study at School XYZ, as the students at School XYZ had a wide array of courses to choose from, and this researcher aims to better understand how these students made sense of their course selections. This chapter will analyze the literature available on the significance of the two programs in order to gain a foundational understanding of the curricula being studied. Following this analysis, a historical introduction to the two programs will be provided.

**Significance.** The Advanced Placement Program and the International Baccalaureate Program are relatively new educational programs, both having their foundations in the 20th century (The College Board, 2003). A desire to bridge the gap between secondary and post-secondary education led to the development of these and several other educational programs (The College Board, 2003). While the program histories are similar, their purposes are quite different. The Advanced Placement Program focuses primarily on aiding students with college acceptance by bolstering their applications with courses akin to introductory college courses (The College Board, 2016b). The International Baccalaureate Program, on the other hand, develops the skills required for college success (International Baccalaureate Organization [IBO], 2017a). The Advanced Placement Program is most prevalent in the United States, although it is recognized worldwide (The College Board, 2003). The International Baccalaureate Program is less popular within the United States but is widespread and respected internationally (Mathews, 2004).

The Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate Programs are well known for their notoriously unmanageable workload (Foust, Hertburg-Davis, & Callahan, 2009). For the Advanced Placement Program, this comes from the breadth of work covered; for the International Baccalaureate Program, this derives from the depth of each topic (Foust et al.,
Both programs are highly structured, which poses both advantages and pitfalls for students and schools (Foust et al., 2009). While the structure of the programs is helpful for underfunded schools working without the aid of college counselors, the rigidity of the structure stifles some students and may actually damage their education, depending on their socioeconomic background (Kyburg, Hertburg-Davis, & Callahan, 2007). Regardless, the Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate Programs are some of the most commonly taken programs worldwide (Mathews, 2004). Most advanced students therefore face a decision regarding which program to choose. International students face a similar dilemma, but the difference in their priorities for education can make the decision an even more nebulous one. Understanding the programs is critical to making this choice.

**A historical introduction to the Advanced Placement Program.** The Advanced Placement Program was created in response to the demand for better college preparation in secondary schools as the gap between secondary and higher education widened in the early 1900s (The College Board, 2003). The Ford Foundation created the Fund for the Advancement of Education and recommended that any repetition of work between secondary and higher education be eliminated (The College Board, 2003). To this end, schools were urged to hire better and more creative teachers who could encourage students to work independently at a college level. Students therefore entered college prepared to meet higher expectations (The College Board, 2003). The Committee on Admission with Advanced Standing developed an introductory college course curriculum and unified educational standards across the program (The College Board, 2003). This program was introduced in 1952, and it offered courses in 11 subjects (The College Board, 2003). The College Board (2003) took over this program in 1955 and renamed it the College Board Advanced Placement (AP) Program. The College Board
(2003) developed the program over the following decades: the 1960s marked the beginning of their commitment to high-quality teacher training, the 1970s and 1980s marked its popularization, and the 1990s marked its increasing inclusion of disadvantaged students.

Today, The College Board (2016b) describes the AP Program as “a rigorous academic program built on the commitment, passion, and hard work of students and educators from both secondary schools and higher education” (para. 1). The AP Program distributes over 4.5 million exams that are taken by 2.5 million students each year, at a fee of $92 per exam (The College Board, 2017b). The program enables students to take college-level courses in high school; its goal is to make students more attractive to colleges (The College Board, 2003). This endeavor is apparently successful, as 31% of colleges reported considering AP experience when deciding scholarships, and 85% of selective colleges reported that AP experience positively affected their admissions decisions (The College Board, 2016b).

The Princeton Review (2017) strongly recommends taking AP courses. These courses are said to serve as a positive introduction to college courses because their pace and level of material covered is similar to introductory college courses; moreover, they require more independent work and analysis (The Princeton Review, 2017). In terms of college admission, The Princeton Review (2017) says that AP courses give weight to a high school transcript and can improve students’ GPA while proving their proclivity for academic rigor. The AP Program also offers a variety of courses so students can choose specific subjects of interest (The Princeton Review, 2017). These courses span 37 subjects; in social science alone, the AP Program offers Comparative Government and Politics, European History, Human Geography, Macroeconomics, Microeconomics, Psychology, U.S. Government and Politics, U.S. History, and World History (The Princeton Review, 2017). In addition, the AP Program scores its exam as a weighted
combination of multiple-choice and free-response sections, with scores ranging from 5, extremely well qualified, to 1, no recommendation. A score of 3 serves as the minimum indication of a student’s capacity to complete introductory-level college courses (The College Board, 2016a).

**A historical introduction to the International Baccalaureate Program.** The International Baccalaureate (IB) Program was developed by 10 member schools of the International Schools Association in 1963 (Nova Scotia Canada, n.d.). Its first trial distribution in 1969 had such positive results that it was considered equivalent to national exams and sufficient for university admission (Nova Scotia Canada, n.d.). While the IB Program’s rise to prominence was slow, it is currently offered in 2,200 schools to 120,000 students each year (Nova Scotia Canada, n.d.).

The IB Program encourages students to think critically and challenge ideas, to foster intercultural understanding and respect, and to learn beyond academia (IBO, 2013). This ideology derives from the belief that in order to achieve peace in the world, education must be interdisciplinary and international (IBO, 2013). The IB Program aims to focus on learners, maximize teaching efficiency, and work in a global context to explore important ideas (IBO, 2013). International Baccalaureate Organization (2016b) stated, “The International Baccalaureate…aims to do more than other curricula by developing inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who are motivated to succeed” (para. 2).

The IB Diploma curriculum is comprised of three core elements and six subject groups. The core elements include Theory of Knowledge (ToK), a class that discusses the nature and acquisition of knowledge; the Extended Essay (EE), a 4,000-word essay students write based on their own individual research; and Creativity, Action, Service (CAS), in which students complete
projects around these concepts (IBO, 2013). The six subject groups include Studies in Language and Literature, Language Acquisition, Individuals and Societies, Sciences, Mathematics, and The Arts (IBO, 2017b). Each subject group is made up of different course options. For example, Individuals and Societies includes Business Management, Economics, Geography, History, Information Technology in a Global Society, Philosophy, Psychology, Social and Cultural Anthropology, World Religions, and Global Politics (IBO, 2017b). Students must take a course in each subject group, except for The Arts, for which students can choose to substitute an extra course in another subject group (IBO, 2017b). The courses are separated into higher and standard levels (IBO, 2017b). IBO (2017b) recommends 150 teaching hours for standard-level courses and 240 teaching hours for higher-level courses. Diploma students take 3 to 4 courses at the higher level, and the rest of the six courses are taken at the standard level (IBO, 2017b). Certificate participants can choose which and how many courses they take and may opt out of any or all of the core elements (IBO, 2014).

IB work is graded on a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 being the highest grade (IBO, 2015). Each grade comes with a detailed descriptor of the level of competence that grade corresponds to for each subject group (IBO, 2015). A student with a grade of 7 in a Group 4 (Sciences) course is described as having “comprehensive knowledge of factual information” and “detailed explanations of complex phenomena and [making] appropriate predictions” (Nova Scotia Canada, n.d.). A student with a grade of 1, in contrast, is described as having “fragments of factual information in the syllabus” and “very little understanding of any concepts or principles” (IBO, 2015, para. 1).

**Conclusion.** Now that a macro-level view of the history and significance of the IB and AP programs has been provided, it is clear that understanding course choice is an important
undertaking for educators and students alike. As stated by Lee (1993), the principal determining factor of curriculum choice is what is available to choose from. In the case of School XYZ, this choice is between the AP and IB programs. The next section reviews the arguments for and against participation in these programs.

**Arguments For and Against IB or AP Participation**

As shown by Gorlitz and Gravert (2016), a student’s choice of high school curriculum affects graduation rates and future employment opportunities. Utilizing a quasi-experimental evaluation design, Gorlitz and Gravert (2016) identified the effects of curriculum reform in different German states as it related to the short-term prospects of dropping out of high school for the first three cohorts subject to the new curriculum requirements (Gorlitz & Gravert, 2016). In this study, students’ choices of high school curriculum were actually diminished, making it more difficult for them to complete their studies in a manner that best suited their academic strengths (Gorlitz & Gravert, 2016). This study aligned with the core purpose of this study at School XYZ, as both focused on a student’s choice of curriculum.

As one might assume, there is no perfect program. The next two subsections of this literature review discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the IB and AP programs for students who pursue them. Once the programs’ strengths and weaknesses have been discussed, they will be compared directly.

**Advantages of IB or AP participation.** Only a handful of programs offer the rigor and academic level that the IB and AP Programs do (Kyburg et al., 2007). Students reported an overall preference for the IB and AP Programs; moreover, researchers noted that participants in these programs took greater pride in their work because the coursework was advanced (Foust et al., 2009). Program participants tended to have higher educational goals; as a result, students
reported feeling more comfortable with expressing academic interest. This, coupled with the volume and difficulty of work shared by participants, built camaraderie among participants. Teachers appeared better prepared to deal with gifted students and gave the students more respect (Foust et al., 2009).

Walstad (2013) stated that the National Assessment of Educational Progress surveyed more than 11,000 12th grade students in the United States in 2006. The study’s aim was to understand U.S. high school students’ choices of economics courses. Walstad (2013) concluded that both the type of course and type of students taught influenced the level of understanding achieved by the end of the course. Specifically, students who were enrolled in an AP economics course understood the U.S. economy, the international economy, and current events better than those who took a standard college-preparatory economics course (Walstad, 2013).

Any advanced course, including the IB and AP Programs, is beneficial to both below-average and underprivileged students. Even students who fail an AP exam remain twice as likely to graduate from college in 5 years; a similar pattern holds for IB participants (Mathews, 2004). Similarly, the prepackaged nature of the AP and IB programs is helpful when there is no college counseling support available at a school. In addition, the opportunity to earn college credit in high school allows students to complete a college degree in less time, and therefore more cheaply (Mathews, 2004). Even for those students who are unaffected by financial limitations, the IB and AP Programs leave high school students generally better prepared for college than those who choose any other honors course (Kyburg et al., 2007).

The IB and AP Programs equip all students with the academic skills necessary for higher education. They improve the outlook even for underprivileged and below-average students by not only offering clear structure in a school’s curriculum, but also by offering them the
opportunity to earn college credit (Foust et al., 2009). However, these programs are not flawless, and the aggregation and isolation of participants in these programs often leads to the development of harsh stereotypes (Foust et al., 2009).

**Disadvantages of IB or AP participation.** While the IB and AP Programs seemed to foster camaraderie between participants, participants also reported an unflattering stereotype of being perceived as smart and snobby (Foust et al., 2009). Participants also found the heavy workload associated with these programs socially limiting and conducive to high stress levels and chronic fatigue (Foust et al., 2009). Students admitted that this stress was often self-induced, likely caused by the high expectations students put upon themselves (Foust et al., 2009). Indeed, it was found that for disadvantaged and minority students, the most important factors for successful learning were not advanced programs but the pervasive belief that students could succeed, coupled with special support systems (Kyburg et al., 2007). Furthermore, it is unknown how many students actually reap the benefit of completing college level courses before college; there is no evidence to suggest that a large percentage of students complete bachelor’s degrees more quickly or cheaply (Foust et al., 2009).

The major criticism of the AP Program derives from the enormity of its workload (Luo, 2013). Coupled with the fast pace of the course, the program tends to lack depth in the material and to rush over important topics, with AP Biology apparently being the worst offender. Even an extra 10 minutes on a topic can affect a class’s ability to complete the course on time. The overwhelming quantity of information students are expected to learn seems to encourage rote memorization among students who are trying to stay on top of coursework (Drew, 2011). The high failure rates associated with the AP Program indicate that students are not properly prepared for the exams (Luo, 2013).
The high expectations set by these programs and the fact that many participants are high academic achievers means that participants experience a great deal of stress and fatigue (Foust et al., 2009). In addition, as much as the rigid structure of these curricula helps underprivileged students, other factors combine to assist such students, namely the belief in their own success (Foust et al., 2009). Furthermore, it seems that many students do not complete their undergraduate degrees at an accelerated pace, despite the potential for college credit from these courses, and so the programs offer no substantial financial relief to underprivileged students. Despite these faults, these programs are the most common way for American high schools to support advanced students. Therefore, the decision between IB and AP is one most advanced students face (Foust et al., 2009). In attempting to understand the relative strengths and weaknesses of the individual programs, it is important to understand the major ideological chasm between the IB and AP Programs. While the IB Program focuses on developing academic and critical skills, the AP Program primarily aims to assist its participants with college admissions.

**IB and AP comparison.** IB participants believed that their teachers were innovative and that the program also taught critical thinking skills well and developed communication with other cultures; AP participants, in contrast, felt their courses were narrow (Drew, 2011). On the other hand, IB participants tended to have fewer friendships with non-participants than AP students did, and they noted that the rigidity of the IB Program was socially disadvantageous (Foust et al., 2009). The flexible nature of some parts of the IB Program, such as the ToK course and the EE, were seen as especially beneficial to students from underprivileged backgrounds. IB students were also more anxious and tired than their AP counterparts. However, the difficulty of work in both programs built a mutual support network among students, a pattern dubbed the cohort effect, whereby students of similar interests establish peer bonding (Foust et al., 2009).
The costliness of IB exams for both students and schools indicates that the IB Program caters to students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Mathews, 2004). Schools are forced to adopt the full IB Program before the school is allowed to offer IB exams, unlike the AP Program, which allows schools to choose which courses to offer and does not require students to take the courses before the exams (Mathews, 2004). The IB Program also has far fewer course options than the AP Program. The IB Program is less familiar to American colleges: it is perceived as foreign and therefore inferior (Mathews, 2004). In addition, American colleges tend to give fewer college credits for IB courses than AP courses (Mathews, 2004).

Of course, the purpose of each program is very different: while the AP Program strives to enable students to earn college credit, the purpose of the IB Program is to prepare students for college work by developing critical thinking skills (Adams, 2014). These programs, at least from the viewpoint of participants, seem to deliver on these promises. AP participants believed that their participation in the program improved their SAT II scores (Luo, 2013), while IB participants reported that the skills taught in the IB Program helped prepare them for college coursework (Coca et al., 2012).

Participants in both courses believed that their advanced program offered more rigorous and challenging courses than honor classes and that they helped them develop study habits (Coca et al., 2012). Participants also believed that the courses had long-lasting personal benefits and improved their chances of being accepted into college. Students associated great academic rigor with both programs and lauded the long-lasting academic benefits of program participation (Coca et al., 2012).

The workload of both the IB Program and the AP Program was reported as unmanageable (Coca et al., 2012). While both programs offer advanced material, the sheer volume of topics
covered in AP courses means that while the AP Program offers great breadth of subjects, it offers little in the way of depth (Luo, 2013). This encourages rote memorization among participants and may contribute to the AP Program’s high failure rate, which indicates a lack of participant preparedness (Drew, 2011). The IB Program, which offers much greater depth in topics covered, tends to fail students socially, with IB students being far more isolated than AP students from non-participants. IB students also reported much greater anxiety (Luo, 2013).

**Conclusion.** The curricula in this study are focused on better education for students and are selected by students at School XYZ. As Lee (2016) stated, “Students in schools with a constrained curriculum that is largely academic in nature cannot ‘choose wrong’” (p. 143). While schools develop a stance of what is good for the students in regards to course choice (Lee, 2016), this study will use this macro-level knowledge to better understand how students make sense of the course choices that they have, taking into consideration the advantages and disadvantages that are discussed in this thread of literature.

**IB and AP Programs in Relation to High Schools and Universities**

The last section of this literature review focuses on the relationship between advanced curricula at high schools and future university study, as reported in peer-reviewed journals. This section discusses the determinants of schools offering the IB or AP Programs, the curricula at international schools, the predictive college capability of AP and IB scores, and the effect of AP and IB scores on college applications.

**Determinants of schools offering IB or AP programs.** Researchers found that schools were only likely to offer advanced courses, such as the IB and AP Programs, if either a large proportion of talented students justified the costs associated with their adoption (Iatarola, Conger, & Long, 2011) or if they wanted to attract high-achieving students to the school.
Schools with large proportions of slightly below-average students generally offered an increasing number of advanced courses, whereas schools with large numbers of slightly above-average students tended not to provide similar courses. Schools that had a large number of high-achieving eighth graders often offered the AP Program (Iatarola et al., 2011).

Among these high-achieving students, schools were most preoccupied with attracting high-income White students (Kyburg et al., 2007). However, despite public concerns, neither the wealth nor race of students had a great effect on a school’s probability of offering IB or AP courses (Iatarola et al., 2011). The only slight variations between the races showed that schools with large proportions of Asian students, and to a lesser extent schools with large proportions of Black and Hispanic students, were far more likely to offer the AP or IB programs than schools with a predominantly White student population (Iatarola et al., 2011). While the specialization among teachers’ degrees at a school did not tend to affect a school’s offering of advanced courses, a correlation was observed between large numbers of teachers at schools and increased numbers of AP course offerings (Iatarola et al., 2011). In terms of the situation and size of schools, larger schools were more likely to offer the IB or AP Program, while low-income rural schools tended to not offer either (Iatarola et al., 2011).

Kanno and Kangas (2014) studied eight English language learners (ELLs) to understand the determinants of schools offering advanced course choices in high school in a real-life situation. The participants took part in a longitudinal qualitative case study as they transitioned from high school to university. The aim of this study was to understand these students’ course options in high school (Kanno & Kangas, 2014). These students were all from the same suburban high school in Pennsylvania and identified as ELL (Kanno & Kangas, 2014). The researchers concluded that these students had a lack of opportunity, or at least a perceived lack of
opportunity, concerning advanced-level high school courses, which made it more difficult for them to progress to university studies (Kanno & Kangas, 2014).

**Curricula at international schools.** Students at international schools reported feeling that “learning to speak more than one language fluently,” “being in a school environment where a number of languages are frequently spoken,” and “taking examinations acceptable for university entrance in a number of countries” were vital parts of their education (Hayden, Rancic, & Thompson, 2000, pp. 549-568). For teachers, offering international curricula, such as the IB Program, took precedence (Hayden et al., 2000). Both students and teachers valued open-mindedness and flexibility in thinking and in action, which were considered the most important parts of international education (Hayden et al., 2000).

American curricula was offered at 23% of international schools, with the AP Program being among the most common (Hayden et al., 2000). Moreover, 46% of international schools offered some type of internationally oriented curricula, with 17% of international schools offering the IB Program (Hayden et al., 2000). One might expect that more international schools would offer the IB Program because its well-roundedness would satisfy the priorities of most international schools. However, IB’s limitations, particularly its expense, might be a factor in reducing its popularity even though the IB Program appeared to be a stronger predictor of college success than the AP Program (Luo, 2013).

**Predictive college capability of AP and IB scores.** AP students tended not to do significantly better in their college courses than those who did not take the AP Program (Hayden et al., 2000). This finding contrasted with the popular belief among colleges and students alike that participating in the AP Program improved college results (Hayden et al., 2000). Luo (2013) found that AP students scored lower than expected in college, with students who achieved a 5 on
their AP exams receiving B’s in college courses. Therefore, it seems that AP exams are not a strong predictor of college success (Luo, 2013).

Caspary (2011) stated that 17% of IB students who scored 6 or higher on three or more of their IB exams attended selective small arts and science colleges, and 48% of them enrolled at selective research universities. In addition, 78% of the students who went to small arts and science colleges graduated in 4 years, and 73% of the research university students graduated at the same pace (Caspary, 2011). Furthermore, 75% of IB diploma participants graduated in 4 years, and a further 86% graduated within 6 years (Caspary, 2011). Results for holders of IB certificates were lower, but still impressive: 55% of certificate students graduated in 4 years, and 80% in 6 years. Students who received a score of 6 or 7 on three or more IB exams had a 4-year graduation rate of 81% and a 6-year rate of 91% (Caspary, 2011). Among IB students at international schools, the majority attended selective colleges in the United States and 68% enrolled in selective colleges worldwide (Caspary, 2011).

The best predictors of college success were SAT II results and cumulative GPA, not advanced course results (Long, Conger, & Iatarola, 2012). Long et al. (2012) reached that conclusion using panel data from public high schools in Florida, as well as data on 10th grade course selection, graduation rates, and post-secondary success. It seems that IB and AP results are not good predictors of SAT II results (Luo, 2013). The 31% variance in SAT II math scores between IB and AP participants and non-participants could be accounted for by other variables, such as parental education level, socioeconomic standing, and gender (Luo, 2013). That is not to say that AP or IB scores are poor predictors of college acceptance, and universities, especially selective ones, increasingly expect advanced courses like IB or AP (Luo, 2013). Therefore, while
excellent IB or AP scores may not indicate equivalent college success, they are an important factor in determining college acceptance in the first place.

**Effect of AP and IB scores on college application.** In recent years, there has been a legal push to require public universities to set uniform policies in recognizing IB, AP, and dual-enrollment courses (Adams, 2014). However, students remain uncertain whether universities will award them college credit for such courses, with policies on awarding college credit varying even within departments of a single university. A 2013 College Board Survey of 1,380 institutions revealed that 68% of those institutions gave credit for an AP score of 3, while 30% required a 4, and 2% required a 5 (Adams, 2014). Generally, universities are reluctant to award college credit because it involves them giving up tuition fees. Public institutions are more magnanimous in awarding college credit because they receive a smaller volume of applications involving advanced courses (Adams, 2014). Highly selective universities are the least likely to award college credit because they are inundated with advanced applications. Students participating in advanced courses said they were less likely to apply to universities that did not give college credits (Adams, 2014). For the most part, however, selective colleges use AP scores as a way to identify highly capable students and gauge the quality of a high school.

Students reported taking AP courses because they believed that such courses were essential to a competitive college application (The College Board, 2017b). The College Board (2017b) found that 70% of those surveyed reported that earning college credit was the main reason they took an AP course; 62% prioritized increasing chances of college admission and 54% prioritized building skills needed in college. Studies have found that students with college-level experience had higher 6-year graduation rates and completed their college degrees in 4.6 years, less than the 5-year average for non-participants (Adams, 2014).
Earning college credit in high school was a priority for many students, even though it had debatable benefits because many students who earned college credit before college did not complete degrees at an accelerated pace (Adams, 2014). In this respect, the AP Program is more useful to students because many universities, especially American ones, recognize and value AP scores. Less is known about the effects of IB scores on college acceptance; however, the success of IB Diploma students at the college level may indicate that IB scores are not detrimental to college application even though many American universities are more comfortable with AP scores (Adams, 2014).

It seems that most students opting for the IB Program are less concerned with college admission and more concerned with college skill preparation (The College Board, 2017b). In reality, the AP and IB Programs are so well respected, and their students relatively successful in post-secondary education, that decent grades in either program seem to offer college application benefits. However, studies have shown that IB and AP scores were actually poor predictors of college success, with AP students in particular scoring below their predicted college grades. SAT II and cumulative GPA were stronger predictors (Luo, 2013). It seems reasonable, however, to think that there must be some correlation between a high SAT II score and high AP or IB scores, even though causation cannot be inferred. Therefore, while the IB and AP scores are not great predictors of college success, successful college students are likely to have high IB and AP scores. The IB and AP Programs offer such a myriad of post-secondary educational benefits that, despite their drawbacks, these programs seem to the best way to support advanced students and bolster college applications.

**Conclusion.** Long et al. (2012) argued, “The aim is to increase the number of students taking rigorous courses under the belief that taking such courses will increase college going and
college completion, despite a lack of experimental or rigorous quasi-experimental evidence to support [this] belief” (p. 315). However, data suggests that the actual subject matter being studied does not always affect postsecondary success (Long et al., 2012). This raises questions about whether a student would decide to pick one course over the other. Ultimately, this study at School XYZ aimed to fill the gap in school-level evidence as a means of better understanding students’ course choices.

**Summary**

In summary, based on the existing literature, there is cause to further investigate the ways in which students make sense of their course choices at School XYZ. There has been research conducted on the historical implications, advantages and disadvantages, and implications of participating in an advanced curriculum (Long et al., 2012). However, it is now important to conduct research at the micro level, as students are the ones affected by such decisions. After all, “there is reason to believe that unequal information about…student choice of courses increases social stratification in education” (Lee, 1993, p. 141). However, since “most of the relationships between course-taking and outcomes are the same across demographic groups” (Long et al., 2012, p. 315), one can assume that understanding ways in which students make sense of their course choices can be used across the network of schools that School XYZ belongs to and across an even larger, worldwide system. Now that this researcher has established what literature is available to support this study, the next chapter will describe the methodology used in this study, as well as its research approach and research tradition.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how students made sense of their experience selecting high school courses. Chapter 3 concentrates on the methodology used in this study, as well as the research approach and research tradition. It describes the sampling strategy, the participants, and participant recruitment, followed by a discussion of trustworthiness and ethical considerations. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the specific steps taken in the process of data collection and data analysis in relation to qualitative research methods.

The research question developed to frame this study is: “How do Class of 2017 high school graduates of School XYZ make sense of their shared experience of selecting high school courses?” The goal of this research was to gain a better understanding of high school students’ decision making related to their selection of high school courses. Qualitative research was an appropriate choice for this study for a number of reasons. As “qualitative designs rely on quality of description, rather than quantifying large samples of people” (Abbott & McKinney, 2013, p.36), it is suitable for a thesis that examines how people make sense of life experiences and decisions. Additionally, “qualitative designs rely on great detail in reporting human processes” and seeks to “collect detailed information about smaller groups” (Abbott & McKinney, 2013, p.36). Capturing the individual experience allows one to measure specific reactions by individuals, measuring them in context with the group. As described by Merriam (2009), qualitative researchers are concerned with understanding the significance people have formed, that is, how people make sense of their world and their experiences in the world (Merriam, 2009). In this research, the “world” studied was that of high school course selection and how students made sense of that experience.

Research Approach
As the nature of the research question was “how” and “why,” a qualitative research method was used for this study. As described by Freebody (2006), qualitative research is useful in the field of education as it relates to four challenges: (a) the importance of education; (b) the complexity and dynamics of education; (c) education, historically, has not been studied using this method; and (d) the way that people are taught is not limited to the classroom. This qualitative research aimed to understand how high school students made sense of their experience selecting courses. In addition, qualitative methods convey participants’ stories as well as tell their story (M. Patton, 2002). As qualitative research is focused on collecting rich data about people and processes through field research and content analysis (Abbott & McKinney, 2013), it was an appropriate choice for this study.

**Paradigm.** A paradigm represents a worldview, and places individuals and their relationships within that worldview (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Interpretivism was used as the paradigm to frame the study, as it best related to the research question and to this researcher. Interpretivism, as described by Geertz (1973), is the act of interpreting a deeper meaning using narratives or people’s behaviors. It is important to entertain the idea that there may be multiple reasons for a student’s choice of courses (Denzin, 2010). As this qualitative study tried to determine the deeper meaning behind a student’s choices of courses at the high school level, interpretivism was an appropriate paradigm for this study.

**Research tradition.** The use of qualitative research has a rich history, as its “traditions present diverse approaches to research and that each tradition forms a coherent whole, comprising internally consistent assumptions about human nature and society, foci of study, and methodology” (Jacob, 1987, p. 1). The basis of qualitative research is steeped in the idea that it is not based upon a single methodology or belong to a single discipline (Yilmaz, 2013). For the
purpose of this study, we will examine the epistemological, theoretical, and methodological keystones of qualitative research. Qualitative research “draws on philosophical ideas in phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, hermeneutics and other traditions to support the attention on quality rather than quantity” (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 312).

As “qualitative studies are concerned with process, context, interpretation, meaning or understanding through inductive reasoning” (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 313), the following figure represents the qualitative mode of inquiry (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 314):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumptions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Realities are multiple, constructed, and holistic. Reality is socially constructed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Knower and known are interactive, inseparable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Primacy of subject matter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Variables are complex, interwoven, and difficult to measure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Inquiry is subjective, value-bound.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Contextualisation (Only time and context bound working hypotheses through idiographic statements)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Understanding actors’ perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ends with hypotheses or grounded theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Emergence and portrayal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Researcher as the instrument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Naturalistic or nonintervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Inductive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Searchers for patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Seeks pluralism, complexity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Makes minor use of numerical indices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Descriptive write-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Personal involvement and partiality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Empathic understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Emic (insider’s point of view)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to Yilmaz (2013), in a qualitative study, a close relationship should be established between the researcher and participants. This qualitative study gathered data through in-depth interviews, so the level of analysis emulated this level of detail. Using a small sample size (10 students) allowed the data to be thorough and detailed, which ultimately allowed a deeper understanding of the experience being researched.

Participants and Access

The researcher selected participants in this study from among students who had recently graduated from an international high school in southwest London. The researcher sought permission from the participants and their parents prior to the study. Because the researcher was an employee at the high school, efforts were made to select students who had not taken a class from the researcher in order to reduce bias. This issue will be discussed in further detail in the Trustworthiness section. The researcher secured permission to conduct the study from the high school leadership, and supplemented the interviews with information about the students’ chosen coursework and university choices gathered from the high school administration. In an attempt to gather a purposeful sample, the researcher gave equal weight to gender and ethnicity. As the intended sample of this study was students who had recently graduated from high school, the participants’ age was not a determining factor: the students would all be of similar age.

Sampling. At the high school where the research took place, students could choose from among three different types of curricula: American high school diploma, Advanced Placement (AP) classes, and the International Baccalaureate (IB) Program. AP and IB courses are considered more advanced than the traditional American diploma. As the aim of this study was to evaluate how high school students made sense of their experience selecting courses, it was
important to have a representative sample from each curriculum. Therefore, this study used a stratified sample.

It was possible to design a stratified sample for this study because the researcher had detailed knowledge about the population characteristics. According to Fowler (2002), a stratified sample reflects the overall population, or put simply, is a miniature reproduction of the sample. Before sampling, the population should be separated into characteristics of importance for the research. Approximately 50 percent of the students in the senior class were pursuing the IB Program, 30 percent were pursuing the AP Program, and 20 percent aimed to complete the American high school diploma. Once the students were classified into categories, these ratios were reflected in the 10 students randomly chosen to interview: five IB students, three AP students and two American high school diploma students.

**Recruitment.** Before making initial contact with potential participants, the researcher was granted approval by Northeastern University’s Institutional Research Board to conduct the study (Appendix A). There was no specific required number of participants for this qualitative study; however, the sample was homogenous. The researcher sent an email (Appendix B) to senior students at the high school that solicited their participation. The students were given the researcher’s contact information and encouraged to contact the researcher if they had any questions about the research. Because the researcher had detailed knowledge about the population’s characteristics, it was possible to design a stratified sample for this study from the responses received. Before sampling, the population was separated into characteristics of importance for the research. Approximately 50 percent of the students in the senior class were pursuing the IB Program, 30 percent were pursuing the AP Program, and 20 percent aimed to complete the American high school diploma. Once the students were classified into categories,
these ratios were reflected in the 10 students randomly chosen to interview: five IB students, three AP students, and two American high school diploma students. Once the 10 participants were identified, they were notified of their selection via an email, which included a consent form (see Appendix C) (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

**Data Collection**

It is vital to identify the purpose and approach for collecting data in any study. One-on-one semi-structured interviews lasting 45 to 60 minutes were the primary data collection method for this qualitative research study. As an administrator at the international high school being studied, the researcher had direct access to documentation, observations, and records. The researcher was the only person conducting the interviews. This study focused on a group of students who were in their final year of high school study, and thus it was important to monitor their course selection throughout the year, particularly at the beginning, mid-year, and at their graduation. It was also important to gather documentation about the students’ choices in their university applications and final decisions about if, and where, they chose to further their education. The researcher asked students about their perceptions of their high school course selection in semi-structured interviews, which were audiotaped and later transcribed.

The transcribed interviews are included as an appendix to this study. The interviews were conducted in the interview rooms in the high school office. The researcher hoped this would help the participants feel at ease, as it was a surrounding with which they were familiar.

During the semi-structured interviews, the researcher aimed to enable a comfortable exchange with the participants that would encourage them to provide a detailed account of the experience being studied. The researcher’s task was to put each participant’s experience in context by asking him or her to tell as much as possible about him or herself related to the topic.
Because the topic of this study was to explain students’ experience selecting courses, the interview included questions regarding the student’s upbringing, previous schooling, family situation, relationships with friends, and so on. The goal of this interview was to have the participants form a narrative about their past experiences that led them to their current position (Gergen, 2001).

The interviews also aimed to gain an understanding of the students’ present lived experience related to the study topic. The researcher tried to understand specific details about the students’ experiences, thus the participants were asked to tell stories that would draw out additional information. The researcher also asked participants about their experiences related to the larger social context at the high school.

Finally, questions in this semi-structured interview addressed the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants’ work and life. Simply put, the students were asked to put into words their thoughts about their experience with high school course selection. The students were asked to look at how aspects of their lives led them to their present situation. This included understanding how they made meaning of the courses they are taking, and how those courses may affect their future educational opportunities. This interview allowed the researcher to enter each participant’s world.

**Data Analysis**

Qualitative research requires a verbatim record of the data collection (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014), thus the audio recordings from the interviews were transcribed. These transcriptions were completed through a transcription service. The researcher supplemented the transcription with notes of non-verbal communication and other memos that are included in the findings (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).
Once data was collected through documentation and interviews, the computer-based program MAXQDA was utilized to identify themes and patterns. Unlike statistical studies, computer programs like MAXQDA do not deliver a final output, but rather offer a starting point for continuing the analysis. Study limitations were defined as a catalyst for future research opportunities.

Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, (2014) provided a six-step guide for analyzing data, which this study followed:

**Step 1: Affixing codes to a set of field notes drawn from data collection.** In an effort to slow down and focus attention on each case, the researcher read and re-read the interview transcripts. This was done in conjunction with listening to the audio recordings. This first step allowed the researcher to begin to enter the participant’s world (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014) and laid a foundation for the next steps in the process.

**Step 2: Initial noting.** Initial noting is the first and most detailed level of analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The researcher made detailed notes and comments about what the participants said in the margins of the transcripts. This could also be described as open coding, as the researcher was making a summary of what was being said or commenting on themes within the dialog (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). These comments were grouped into three different types, descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014), which ultimately allowed the researcher to interpret meaning from the transcribed texts.

**Step 3: Developing emergent themes.** The researcher developed emergent themes using the notes that were created in Step 2. Expressed as phrases, themes speak to the psychological crux, but are also both specific and abstract so they can be grouped accordingly (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). It was the researcher’s goal to use the notes to make connections
by fragmenting the text and then categorizing these notes into themes. Emergent themes not only capture the participant’s words, but also the researcher’s interpretation (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

**Step 4: Searching for connections across emergent themes.** While there is no prescribed method for completing this step, the researcher connected emergent themes to produce a structure that illustrated the most interesting or important themes. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) outlined two different methods that may be used to complete this process: clustering related themes after reading through the list or physically cutting up the list of themes and moving them around into groups that share meaning.

**Step 5: Gradually elaborating a small set of generalizations that cover the consistencies recognized in the data base.** There were 10 cases in this study. After analyzing one case, the researcher moved on to another. The task was to set aside the prior cases and not let them influence the analysis of the next.

**Step 6: Looking for patterns across cases.** Once the researcher individually analyzed all the cases, it was time to compare and contrast them to look for patterns or themes that may have developed. The researcher used these to create a master table of themes as a method of presenting the data.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical issues arise at all levels of social research, including, in this study, getting informed consent; getting access to and acceptance of the research setting; and matters of privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality. Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1992) expressed the fundamental significance of ethics in an entire research project in terms of a cost/benefit ratio.
Before starting a project, it is important to balance the benefits against any potential costs, ethical and otherwise.

The researcher received authorization from the school and, as previously mentioned, obtained consent from the students through the consent form. Throughout the process of acquiring the sample, the researcher made consent and voluntary participation clear. The researcher protected the interests of the participants through anonymity and confidentiality. As recommended by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), the researcher used pseudonyms to help protect each participant’s identity. Before gaining written consent from the participants, the researcher gave them a full explanation of the aim and objectives of the study in order to avoid any fear of deception or misrepresentation. The researcher assured the students that this study would not affect their grades or status at the school, lest they should feel threatened by its focus.

**Trustworthiness**

As a basis of establishing trustworthiness within a study, there is a responsibility to do the following: (a) have clear and substantiated research questions, (b) use a research design that is appropriate for the study, (c) apply purposeful sampling strategies, (d) collect and manage data appropriately and systematically, and (e) analyze the data (Baxter & Jack, 2008). After gathering the data for this study, triangulation was used to ensure data credibility. In addition, the researcher shared interpretations of the data with the participants, and participants also could review the transcripts of their interviews. This allowed the participants to discuss and clarify the data, and also gave them an opportunity to add anything that they deemed important to the study (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Finally, the researcher stored all materials, including consent forms, in a secure, locked cabinet.

**Validity and Credibility**
According to some scholars, it is imperative that different methodological approaches are reinforced by particular philosophical or theoretical assumptions and that researchers maintain consistency between their philosophical starting point and their adopted methods (Ormston, Spencer, Barnard, & Snape, 2014). Maintaining this consistency was used to help ensure validity. Along with consistency, authenticity is associated with validity and credibility. Because many different meanings of validity are possible, the authenticity of the person, phenomenon, or situation becomes important criteria for cogency; an attempt to remain true to the phenomenon under study is essential (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). Ultimately, the criteria used to ensure credibility and validity cannot be simplistic, as that would defy the purpose of qualitative research.

Yardley (2000) proposed four principles for assessing the quality, validity, and credibility of qualitative research. The first principle is sensitivity to context. In order for qualitative research to be conducted effectively and with credibility, it is important for the researcher be sensitive to context. This is accomplished through adopting a qualitative research method, which deals with samples of participants who share an experience. In order to create a working rapport with these participants, the researcher was sensitive to the interaction between the participants and himself. The second principle is commitment and rigor. One of the goals of this qualitative study was to acquire data that was accurate and in-depth. Because interviews were used to obtain this data, it was critical that the researcher demonstrated attentiveness to the participant as well as thoroughness throughout the study. The third principle is transparency and coherence. In reporting the data, the researcher was as clear and coherent as possible. This was accomplished through the use of tables, charts, and transcripts of interviews, which ultimately aided in connecting the theoretical lens with the study. The fourth and final principle is impact and
importance. The research that was conducted was useful and informed the reader of something interesting.

**Potential Researcher Bias**

Qualitative researchers who employ interviews as a data source in their study face challenges in the form of instrumentation rigor and bias management (Chenail, 2011). It is understood that the researcher influences the collection and interpretation of qualitative data (Finlay, 2002), so it was important for me to be aware of the bias that I brought with me to the study. Researcher bias is possible at each stage of qualitative research, and understanding this helped me and readers better understand the study (Pannucci & Wilkins, 2010).

I recognize that I have a number of forms of researcher bias. First, my professional background is directly related to the subject matter being researched. As a college counselor, my job is to help students with their transition from high school to university studies. There are many facets to this transition, but one of the major components of students’ success in their university applications is their academic ability, including the rigor of coursework they choose to take during high school.

Another bias I have is my belief that education should be available to anyone who wants it. While there is little debate that many factors contribute to the transition from high school to college (W. Smith & Zhang, 2009), participation in advanced curricula is believed to have benefits for many interested parties, including universities, administrators, teachers, students, and parents (Park, Caine, & Wimmer, p.129). This philosophy, when combined with research about students’ perceptions about coursework and university placement, could have an unforeseen effect on this study.
A third concern in this most likely not exhaustive list is “response effect bias,” which happens when people tell interviewers what they want to hear (Butin, 2010). As I will be conducting these interviews with students at the school where I work, students may feel a sense of trepidation or be reluctant to give a truthful answer if they feel that the truthful response goes against the school’s policies or procedures. I hope that the use of open-ended questions will elicit more thoughtful responses that may combat any of these, and other, biases.

**Limitations**

Regardless of the amount of analysis completed, there were study limitations that provide a catalyst for future research opportunities. These limitations include:

**Only studying three different types of curricula.** At the high school whence the participants were selected, there were only three different choices of curricula that a student may pursue. As there are a number of other curricula offered at schools worldwide, the three studied were simply a microcosm of a greater educational system. Students who study under these different curricula may have very different responses to these questions.

**Only working with participants as they complete their high school studies.** There may have been different results if the sample group consisted of recent high school graduates who had reflected on the complete process of high school and made a decision about their future plans. However, this study sampled from current high school students due to the accessibility of participants.

**Representativeness of the school.** The high school studied may not be a representation of a “typical” high school, so the findings would by no means be universal. As this was a private high school that could be described as having an expensive tuition, the students selected to participate in this study may not have represented the greater population. Demographics, such as
family income and family educational history, may have subconsciously affected the participant responses.

**The use of interviews at the expense of other qualitative methods.** While utilizing interviews in this study aligned with the chosen method and theory, it was not the only qualitative method that could have been used. Others methods include case study and ethnography. Future studies that implement different types of qualitative methods might obtain a different perspective on the research question.

**Conclusion**

Chapter 3 served as an overview of the methodology that was used in this study. This chapter highlighted the steps for choosing participants and collecting data. Chapter 4 will attend to the data analysis stage of this project. It will include descriptions of the participants and present the interview findings.
Chapter 4: Summary of Findings

While literature on the shared experience of student course selection is limited, both anecdotal information and research reveal the need for further study. As the purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate high school students’ shared experiences of selecting their courses for school, 10 high school students were interviewed. This chapter focuses on these interviews and the analysis of the transcripts that were created from them. Table 1 displays the gender and curriculum breakdown of the 10 participants.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Curriculum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Janet</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>AP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>IB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesley</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>AP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marc</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>AP/IB mix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>IB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>IB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>IB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blake</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>AP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polina</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>IB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>IB</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MAXQDA was utilized to help identify the superordinate and subordinate themes that best represented the shared experiences of the students and the meaning behind those experiences, rather than simply the actions of selecting courses. The analysis of the transcripts yielded three superordinate themes and seven subordinate themes. This chapter focuses upon each of these superordinate and subordinate themes, one at a time, in an effort to enable the researcher to draw conclusions based on the evidence provided. These themes are:

- Superordinate theme 1: Utility value
  - Subordinate theme 1.1: Evaluating university plans and requirements
- Subordinate theme 1.2: Considering career goals and aspirations

- Superordinate theme 2: Relatedness
  - Subordinate theme 2.1: College counselors
  - Subordinate theme 2.2: Teachers
  - Subordinate theme 2.3: Peers

- Superordinate theme 3: Connecting choices to students’ backgrounds
  - Subordinate theme 3.1: Connecting new learning to previous learning
  - Subordinate theme 3.2: Modeling how choices are made

Figure 2 is a representation of the code matrix browser that is produced by MaxQDA.

The code matrix browser provides an overview of selections and codes from the transcriptions and enables the researcher to infer relevant themes.

Figure 2. Code matrix browser. This chart offers a visualization of the number of segments coded with each code for each document. The larger and redder squares represent a higher concentration of coded evidence.

From this point, it is then important to take a more in-depth view of each individual interview. This is done using the document portrait feature of MAXQDA, which produces a visualization that reflects the weight of each superordinate code. While each of the 10 interviews
lasted approximately 45 minutes, this feature focuses upon the proportion of time, and point in the interview, that each code was discussed (Appendix D).

**Superordinate Theme 1: Utility Value**

The interviewed students were concerned about what their plans would be after graduation; all experienced different feelings about this. The first superordinate theme, *Utility value*, looks at how students made sense of their selections by demonstrating how their choices created leverage in future choices. As seen in the aforementioned document portraits, *Utility value* was present, to varying degrees, in each of the 10 interviews. Within the superordinate theme of *Utility value*, the two subordinate themes were not represented equally, as shown in Figure 2. From this representation, it is clear that the students interviewed focused much more on evaluating university plans and requirements than on considering career goals and aspirations. Regardless, both subordinate themes are vital to understanding the student experience of selecting courses. As Marc stated, “I would say that's a big aspect for my interest in some classes is how I can apply it to the real world and to my future” (personal communication, May 17, 2017).

**Subordinate theme 1.1: Evaluating university plans and requirements.** All of the participants were planning to attend university after graduating high school. According to the students’ responses, this played a role in their decision regarding which classes to take in high school, with many of the students claiming that they felt that future education influenced their course selection. As previously stated in this study, 98% of the graduating students at School XYZ go on to further their studies at the university level. Students are not required to choose IB or AP when they enter high school at School XYZ. However, they do have to make this decision starting in Grade 11, so information gathered
in Grade 10 tends to be critical. According to Lesley, “I think it was in Grade 10 that I started going to the open days and university fairs. There was universities visiting the school and so for every one I visited I tried to grab a prospectus because it just made comparing them a lot easier” (personal communication, May 17, 2017). Approximately 300 university visitors come to the School XYZ campus each year to speak to students. These meetings take the form of presentations, university fairs, and also opportunities for visiting professors to teach classes. Lesley later stated that these visits “give you the requirements for the course and it’s just really a very simple way of seeing what you need to take and what then allows you to take at the IB to get into that university course” (personal communication, May, 17, 2017).

All of the students interviewed were all planning to attend university in the United States or the United Kingdom, and these educational systems have different entrance requirements. While the U.S. admissions process is focused around the holistic review of an applicant, the UK has specific academic entrance requirements that a student must meet in order to gain admission. Regardless of the requirements, university plans played a major part in students making sense of their high school course selection. Janet, who will be attending a university in the United States, stated that future university prospects “pushed me to take more Advanced Placement (AP) classes than regular classes” (personal communication, April 19, 2017). Polina, an IB student, felt the same pressure from universities and stated, “Yeah, so, I saw quite a few colleges who came to visit the school and they pretty much told us what they wanted to see in their students. So, I took that on board and try to apply that to my schedule” (personal communication, June 6, 2017). Another IB student, Lesley, appreciated how the IB Program enabled her to take a broad range of subjects. She also felt that IB could limit those students who knew what they wanted to
study at the university level because the broad range of subjects does not allow in-depth study of specific subjects (personal communication, May 17, 2017).

Marc summarized how evaluating university plans and requirements made its way into the students’ thinking:

I think one main aspect that sometimes gets overlooked is just the university opinions on classes and the reasoning behind taking the classes is more so just to... I would admit that some of my classes I took, yes I was interested in them but definitely one thing that helped me decide to take them was the fact that it would look good for university and my application. Because at this point really, high school, the main thing about it is trying to get into your university that you want to go to and spend the next four years at. (personal communication, May 17, 2017)

Subordinate theme 1.2: Considering career goals and aspirations. While all 10 students were mindful that they were planning to attend university, some were even more specific about their career aspirations after university. Many of the students referenced career placement, either at university or in general. At School XYZ, students are advised on career placement from as early as Grade 9. They are given career-interest inventories and assessments, which help students understand where their passions and education can lead in the future.

Some of the 10 students felt that they were certain about what they wanted to pursue in their future careers. This, in a way, aligns with the higher education system in the UK, where students are required to apply directly into a course, rather than the liberal arts style of education that many Americans are familiar with. This clear direction was evident while interviewing Emma, who stated:
I decided to choose medicine at about halfway through year 10, and then that kind of really helped me to finalize my subject choices...because they're all very applicable to the subjects of medicine and all stand in entry requirements within medicine. (personal communication, May 30, 2017)

These entry requirements are defined on the UCAS website, www.ucas.com. As Emma was an IB student, she had to choose her IB subjects in Grade 10, and these subjects would remain the same for the next 2 years. Because medicine at a UK university was her chosen career path, she had little choice but to study biology, chemistry, and mathematics at a higher level. However, not all students were as aware of what their future career plans might be.

Lesley was less clear about her future university plans and decided to study the AP Program. In spite of this, she felt that IB provided a breadth of courses to choose from, rather than the more focused approach that AP provides. She felt that if you knew what you wanted your future career to be, AP allowed you to take more of that subject. She stated:

If you don't know what you want to do, I think the IB's a really good option because...it forces you to explore a wide range of ideas and subjects, and that can really help you decide what you want to do later. (personal communication, May 17, 2017)

A major difference between Lesley and Emma was their intended university destination. The students who had known that they wanted to study in the United Kingdom were clearer about the entrance requirements needed for their chosen course or major. While this is not always the case and not all courses in the UK require specific coursework (www.uacs.com), those interviewed who planned to continue their education in the UK were more aware than those looking for educational opportunities in the United States.
**Conclusions.** The 10 students were all mindful that university study and careers were in their near future. Thus the data supports the theme that students perceive that they made sense of their selections by demonstrating how their choices created leverage in future choices. After all, as will be seen in the next superordinate theme, the idea of university and career has been imbedded into the culture of School XYZ. What is important to recognize from the concept of *Utility value* is how students make different choices based upon where they see themselves in the future, whether that be geographically or career-wise.

**Superordinate Theme 2: Relatedness**

The second superordinate theme, *Relatedness*, helps students make sense of their decisions through understanding their need to feel a connection to the people who play a significant role in their lives. The formal and informal structures that are part of students’ everyday school experiences seem important as students make decisions. From the moment that students wake up in the morning, they are being told what to do by parents, friends, siblings, teachers, and others. As indicated by the two-way directional arrows in the mind-maps, as well as the interview with Janet, relatedness is evident as there is “definitely a relationship there…trying to give advice, but not just telling me what to do” (personal communication, April 19, 2017). The data indicates that these interactions help students make sense of their decisions.

These interactions took place before students even began their studies at School XYZ, as noted by Samantha. During her interview, she referenced a course selection booklet she was given while seeking admission into the school (personal communication, June 16, 2017). In the booklet, the school outlined the requirements for obtaining a high school diploma. While many of the experiences that the students referenced in their interviews painted the school in a positive
light, it is important to recognize that not all of the interactions that helped students make sense of their decisions were as encouraging. Tom said:

I don't think School XYZ does a very good job of informing what the class is about because when we all signed up to take AP language, we just figured it was the first year of English. I don't think any of us really had any clue what we were getting into for language. (personal communication, May 10, 2017)

Whether positive or negative, clearly the connections that the students have in their lives helped them make sense of the decisions that they made about the courses they took in high school. This theme will take a closer look at three connections that play a significant role in the students’ lives: College counselors, Teachers, and Peers.

**Subordinate theme 2.1: College counselors.** Participants reflected that the role of a college counselor is to advise students on future university and career plans and to help students choose high school classes that would achieve their goals. At School XYZ, there are three full-time college counselors who assist students. When students are in Grades 9 and 10, they primarily work with the college counselors in small groups and attend workshops and presentations. Later, in Grade 11, students are randomly assigned to work with the counseling staff in a one-to-one setting. Prior to this, students can arrange individual meetings with any of the counselors if they have questions or concerns about courses, career placement, or university applications. Janet chose to meet with one of the counselors while in Grade 10 to discuss her junior and senior year courses. She stated:

I went to talk to my college counselor about it and they advised me knowing the kind of universities I was looking for, and what they were looking for as colleges. So that helped
put me in the right direction in terms of finding the right type of classes to take. (personal communication, April 19, 2017)

Since the time that the interviewed students were in Grade 10, the college counselors held a mandatory meeting with all of the students in Grade 10 to discuss their future high school courses.

Depending on the curriculum that students decide to pursue, they need to make this decision, at the very latest, in Grade 10. For example, if a student would like to pursue the full International Baccalaureate Diploma, this two-year program needs to begin in Grade 11, thus decided upon in Grade 10. Because these course selections have a direct implication on university placement, the college counselors want to ensure that students are making informed decisions that would enable them to pursue their desired university plans. During these discussions, the college counselors aim to understand each student’s reason for pursuing a certain track and will often use other resources to help guide a student to make the best decision. Samantha reflected on her meeting with her college counselor in Grade 10: “Their suggestion to look into more work experience and actually experience the profession or see what it entails, and I think that helped me make the decision between medicine or some other scientific course at university” (personal communication, April 19, 2017). She went on to state that having this work experience helped her understand the difference between studying biomedicine and medicine and, ultimately, reinforced her idea of studying medicine.

Not all students utilized the college counselors to the same degree at School XYZ. Since students are assigned a counselor to work with in Grade 11, the relationship and rapport that develops can vary greatly from student to student. For example, Marc talked about how much he felt that his counselor helped him understand how his courses influenced his university
applications, especially because of his mix of AP and IB courses. However, even though he found his counselor to be extremely helpful, Marc stated that he mostly worked with his counselor when it came time to apply to universities, not when he chose his high school courses (personal communication, May 17, 2017).

Ultimately, the idea of college counselors helping students make sense of their course selection came up when speaking with Janet, Marc, Emma, Polina, and Samantha, who comprised half of the interviewed population. This is shown in the document portraits (Appendix D) as well as the students’ mind maps (Appendix E). However, to gain a more robust understanding of Relatedness, the other personal connections that student have at School XYZ must be examined.

Subordinate theme 2.2: Teachers. Teachers see students on almost a daily basis, and many students value the advice that they provide. All 10 students stated that they felt that their teachers helped them, in some way, make sense of their selection of courses while at School XYZ. In total, teachers were referenced 175 times over the course of the 10 interviews, second only to subordinate theme 1.1, Evaluating university plans and requirements.

That data revealed that teachers had significant influence on students’ course selections. For example, Janet said that her decision to enroll in a class “has a lot to do with how the teachers teach a class to how much you get out of it” (personal communication, April 19, 2017). A common theme when discussing teachers at School XYZ was that students tended to pick their classes based upon who they believed would be teaching the class. Even though Janet talked about how much she could get out of a class, within her same response she also stated, “I have heard some cases where I will hear a student talking to another student about, ‘Don’t take this class because so-and-so teaches it and makes it really hard,’ or something like that” (personal
communication, April 19, 2017). While the students may have believed they knew who would be teaching a class in the next academic year, the truth is that it was not determined until the summer, well after students are required to make their course selections.

The teachers that students have had in the past seemed to play a role in most students’ decision-making processes. Lesley stated that she spoke to her previous math teachers at the end of Grade 10 to help determine the best level of math to take in Grades 11 and 12 (personal communication, May 17, 2017). However, Nick had experiences with teachers that weren’t “that great and that interesting” that made him shy away from pursuing certain courses in the IB Program (personal communication, May 22, 2017).

Ultimately, most students seemed to internalize their personal connections with their teachers to make sense of the courses that they selected rather than having a dialogue with teachers directly. Past experiences and future expectations, or lack thereof, weighed heavily on the decisions that the students made. Over and over again, the students gave examples of selections that, looking back, they wish they could have changed based upon their experiences with the teachers. Emma would have changed her decision about French based upon her experience (personal communication, May 30, 2017). Blake did not choose to take Environmental Systems and Societies because of the teacher (personal communication, June 1, 2017). It was rarer to hear feelings like those conveyed by Polina: “I had a teacher for AP Euro…, who I've found is a great teacher, really inspired me to learn more about history, and, that's one of the key factors of why I chose to do AP US History” (personal communication, June 6, 2017). Whether it was positive or negative, it was clear from the students that the day-to-day interactions with the teaching staff helped the students make sense of what classes they took at School XYZ.
Subordinate theme 2.3: Peers. High school tends to be a social environment and students talk to one another about their choices and goals. Janet, for example, felt that it was quite common for students to talk to each other about course selection at School XYZ (personal communication, April 19, 2017). Some used the opportunity of selecting courses to distinguish themselves from their peers, such as Samantha, who stated, “it just appealed to me a lot that I was able to do all of these different creative courses and my friends in India weren't able to do. So that was really exciting” (personal communication, June 16, 2017). While some students wanted to differentiate themselves, others wanted to try to be in the same classes as their peers, such as Nick, who stated, “I would also kind of take into consideration what subjects they're [his friends] taking, because sometimes it's kind of hard to go into a subject where you kind of like don't know anyone” (personal communication, May 22, 2017). The common feeling among those interviewed was that the relatedness between peers was an important factor in course selection.

Most students interviewed used their peer network to help identify classes or teachers that they felt were good or bad, easy or hard, and so on. The same could be said when students had to make the choice between the IB or the AP curriculum. Even though Nick wanted to be in classes with his peers, he also turned to his older friends and family for advice. He stated:

I think having friends who were like a year above me who are doing the IB as well, it's kind of like how my sister, like the fact that my sister has as well, they kind of like give me tips on what to do and what not to do. They're always like “Oh yeah, higher-level physics is so hard. Don't choose that.” (personal communication, May 22, 2017)

An interesting topic that arose from the student interviews was how students perceived the difficulty of the IB and the AP programs. Polina stated that she often had debates with her
friends over which program they felt was more difficult (personal communication, June 6, 2017). The students taking the AP route seemed to think that they had to shove more information into a 1-year span compared to the 2-year IB Program. Because of this, the AP students felt that a lot of independent learning needed to be conducted in order to cover the curriculum. On the other hand, IB students felt that the depth of material covered and the level of analysis was much more exhaustive and profound than in the AP curriculum.

All but two of the students (Tom and Marc) indicated that they looked towards their peers to help make sense of their course selection. Students’ perceptions about their course selection could be broken down into three categories: some subjects were more difficult than others, some subjects were more enjoyable than others, and some subjects were more useful than others. Whether or not these perceptions were accurate and useful, the fact remains that students used their peer connections to make sense of their selections.

**Conclusions.** It is clear that many formal and informal influencers contributed to students’ decision making during their course selection. Students often stated that they were willing to overlook subject difficulty when they enjoyed the class or needed it to satisfy their career ambitions or university entrance requirements. It is important to recognize that additional factors that may not have been discussed during the interview stage may further interact with the relationships that make up this theme of *Relatedness*. Ultimately, by better understanding the need for students to feel a connection to the people who play significant roles in their lives, we recognize that everyday actions and conversations help students make sense of their decisions.

**Superordinate Theme 3: Connecting Choices to Students’ Backgrounds**

The role of family can differ greatly, especially when many cultures are involved. Many interviewed students felt that they considered the opinion of their family members when making
their course decisions. This study was not intended to be an analysis of culture and its influence on student choices. However, it would be illogical to believe that a student’s background does not factor into students’ decisions about course selections.

Throughout the interviews, the level of interaction between students and their families varied greatly. For example, Edward referenced speaking with his parents during the process of choosing courses. During these interactions with his family, he used the phrase, “challenge ourselves,” almost suggesting that his parents were taking the class with him (personal communication, May 26, 2017). On the other hand, Blake stated, “I've talked to so many friends who don't have parents as involved as mine, who have no idea what's going on and how their decisions will affect their future” (personal communication, June 1, 2017). Whatever the degree of connecting choices to students’ backgrounds, it was evident in all 10 students, as depicted in the document portraits. This general idea of a student’s background can be broken down into two subordinate themes: Connecting new learning to previous learning and Modeling how choices are made. This allows us to better understand how students made sense of making course choices when influenced, or not, by their backgrounds.

**Subordinate theme 3.1: Connecting new learning to previous learning.** Of all of the factors identified throughout this study, Connecting new learning to previous learning was the third most frequent theme identified during the 10 interviews. Parents were a common influence among the participants. This may directly reflect the school culture, and was an important factor according to the participants.

Because School XYZ was an international school with a somewhat transient population, it was not surprising that many of the students’ parents were not educated in the same system as the participants. Samantha highlighted this difference when she discussed her parents being
educated in India, where they had to pick a stream, rather than specific courses. Both of her parents picked the science stream and then the courses that they took were prearranged around that choice (personal communication, June 16, 2017). She went on to say:

Everyone in my family that I can think of has done science careers or science has been a major part of their education. So I think of us knew that we wanted to pick science but definitely the electives were completely new because in India we don't stress on co-curricular activities that much. (personal communication, June 16, 2017)

Ultimately, Samantha chose many courses that were related to science, which also tied in with her aspirations to become a doctor.

Not only did the students’ education differ from that of their parents, the students were also aware that, given the transient nature of an international school, there was a distinct possibility that they would not finish out their high school studies at School XYZ. Some students, like Emma, chose to pursue the IB route because she knew that the family might move back to their home country, Australia. After speaking with her family, they agreed that if they did move back to Australia, there were more high schools that offered the IB curriculum than the American-based AP curriculum (personal communication, May 30, 2017).

Time and time again, the students interviewed referenced their parents as factors in how they tried to make sense of choosing their courses at School XYZ. Emma said:

It was definitely a lot of talking with my parents and family and friends about what they had done, or if they had known someone looking at a similar career and how they found it, was probably very influential on my decision. (personal communication, May 30, 2017)

Marc said:
You gotta have the conversations with your parents to see also what they think…They would help me if I wasn't 100% sure taking a class, they would listen to me about at least in my opinion pros and cons of taking a certain class. And overall, they would just help me figuring out my schedule. (personal communication, May 17, 2017)

Lesley said:

My dad has always encouraged me to do whatever makes me happy and to choose something that I enjoy doing. My mom's background is in mathematics so that was also a factor growing up with two parents that are chartered accountants and who have a pretty good background with numbers and working with maths. It made it a lot easier growing up knowing that that was what I was interested in. (personal communication, May 17, 2017)

As previously mentioned, the degree to which the student made use of previous learning varied. Emma related the involvement of her mother, who, in essence, changed the curriculum of the entire high school. Emma described how her mother was disappointed with the school’s lack of a path or direction for course selection, especially within the math curriculum. According to Emma, her mother felt there was a lack of clarity between middle school and high school and “where you would get to depending on which courses you chose. She was always very aware” (personal communication, May 30, 2017). Later in the conversation, Emma went on to say:

Even from fifth grade I remember her saying, “Make sure you work hard now because then you'll be able to go on to advanced math and then you'll be able to get on the math if you end up deciding that you would want to go to engineering, because for me as a child I never knew.” (personal communication, May 30, 2017)
This response from a parent was definitely not the norm, but it illustrates the role that parents have in helping their children make sense of their course selections. Whether or not this connection is beneficial for the student is another discussion entirely. As parents did not participate in this study, a follow-up study with the 10 students’ parents could provide additional insight into how students made sense of their choices. Regardless, from these 10 interviews, it is clear that *Connecting new learning to previous learning*, specifically the previous learning of parents, was a major factor in how the 10 students made sense of their selections at School XYZ.

**Subordinate theme 3.2: Modeling how choices are made.** The final subordinate theme is *Modeling how choices are made*. If a participant had siblings, either older or younger, there seemed to be a common theme of following or setting a precedent. Not all participants had siblings, but for those who did, it was usually identified as a factor in how students made sense of their course selection. Others, such as Marc, used his own precedent, specifically the “feel” that he got from his previous classes (personal communication, May, 17, 2017).

Janet fit the criteria for having choices modeled as well as modeling choices herself, as she had an older sister and a younger brother who attended School XYZ. Following her older sister’s curriculum choice, Janet chose the AP Program. Not only did she follow her choice of curriculum, but she also followed her in choice of university and has since enrolled at Boston College, alongside her sister. Not only did her sister attend the same university, but their mother also attended Boston College, which supports the preceding subordinate theme about previous learning.

Having an older sibling who had experienced the courses at School XYZ put the students at ease. The relationship and familiarity between siblings created trust, which enabled the
students to easily make sense of their course selections. When talking about her older sister, Janet stated:

She was a student who understood me so I felt like the best – she was able to help me sort out my classes so that I was not overwhelmed with work depending on how much work was required for each class. (personal communication, April 19, 2017)

Later, when Janet was asked about her younger brother, she said that she has offered advice to him about course selection. Her advice was for him to discover his learning style and also to learn about the differences between classes before making any decisions.

Janet was not the only student who had an older and younger sibling. Lesley’s younger sister has not been as easy to advise as Janet’s. Lesley stated that she felt comfortable with the requirements of the curriculum and therefore:

Trying to help her [younger sister] to make an informed decision about what she chooses to do without knowing what she wants to do after the IB, I think that's causing a few more problems and a bit of discussion. (personal communication, May 17, 2017)

Before modeling choices for her younger sister, Lesley reviewed the choices made by her older brother. When choosing courses and thinking about what her brother pursued, she stated:

It was pretty clear that those subjects that he was taking weren't the subjects for me because they were much more based on long essays and in-depth responses to a single prompt, whereas what I was interested in solving problems. (personal communication, May 17, 2017)

Not all of those with older siblings relied on them to make sense of their selections. For example, Tom, whose older brother attended School XYZ, stated that he figured out what courses to take without seeking help from his brother.
Being in a fairly small, tight-knit community, even those without older or younger siblings may have experienced modeling when they made their choices. Part of this happens in an informal manner in communication with close acquaintances. More formal modeling may take place when the parents at the school set up social interactions within smaller social groups and cultural communities. Whatever the case, it is clear that the influence of others seemed to be a common theme of following or setting a precedent, thus helping students to make sense of their course selection by *Modeling how choices are made*.

**Conclusions.** It is noteworthy that even with an attempt at sense making, the students were not always content with their decision. Edward, the one who wanted to “challenge ourselves,” looked back at his decision to take French, instead of history, by saying, “It's been a regret for me, but oh well” (personal communication, May 26, 2017). In today’s world of helicopter parenting and snowplow parenting, it appears that there are many opinions about what is best for a student. However, the question remains, how do we know what is the best advice? Regardless, students need to make sense of their selections and those who were interviewed used *Connecting new learning to previous learning* and *Modeling how choices are made* in order to do this.

**Conclusion**

As demonstrated in this chapter, students utilized a number of different factors to help them make sense of their selection of courses at School XYZ. The three most frequent factors that were discussed by students were *Evaluating university plans and requirements*, *Teachers*, and *Connecting new learning to previous learning*. These three factors fell within different superordinate themes: *Utility value*, *Connecting choices to students’ backgrounds*, and *Relatedness*, respectively.
However, as seen in the interviews, no one factor stands alone. Rather, students used combinations of many factors to help them make sense of their selections. Some students, such as Nick, had a relatively even proportion of the three superordinate themes. Others, like Janet, Tom, and Samantha, used one superordinate theme much more than the others.

Having students complete a mind map before their interview enabled them to think about the factors that they felt helped make sense of their course selection. In addition to these mind maps, the interview allowed the students to expand on these factors as well as identify other factors that they may not have originally considered. Ultimately, after analyzing the transcripts of the 10 interviews it is clear that the students’ reflections on how they made sense of their selecting courses at School XYZ are complicated and vary greatly.

The final chapter of this dissertation will discuss the research findings as they relate to both the literature and theoretical framework. The dissertation will culminate with a reflection on the research and its implications for future practice and research.
Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this qualitative research was to investigate high school students’ shared experiences of selecting their courses for school. All students at School XYZ had an American-style curriculum at the core of their high school studies. However, in addition to this core curriculum, students could choose either the IB or AP curriculum. The research question that helped direct this study was, “How do Class of 2017 high school graduates of School XYZ make sense of their shared experience of selecting high school courses?”

This chapter will be divided as follows: First, the purpose of this research will be revisited. Following this, the theoretical framework will be revisited. However, now that the research and analysis have been completed for this study, the theoretical framework will be related directly to the findings. A discussion of the themes will follow, which will link the findings to pre-existing literature and research. These will lead to recommendations for practice as well as recommendations for future research and finally a conclusion for the chapter and the study as a whole.

Research Purpose

The implications of course selection can be vast. From mental well-being to further university study, understanding why students make the choices they do can help School XYZ better prepare students for these choices. In addition, because they are targets for university admission offices around the world, students at School XYZ know that their performance in high school has a direct influence on their future studies. Narrowing the research being conducted is the increasingly competitive nature of university admissions. However, in order for students to have successful university applications, they must first make sense of their selection of courses in high school.
Revisiting the Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was Krumboltz’s social learning theory, as the goal of this study was to understand an individual’s experiences in the broader context of a group of students (Krumboltz, 2008). The concept of a shared experience centering on a choice is in line with the experiences discussed in social learning theory, only this study specifically focused on education (Krumboltz, 2008). As part of this study, students at School XYZ were asked to complete mind-maps as well interviews with the researcher. These activities adhere to social learning theory’s emphasis on self-evaluation. This framework was relevant because it focuses on self-evaluation and understanding the effect of individual learning experiences within a group (Walsh & Osipow, 1988).

“Social learning theory focuses on learning that occurs within a social context and how people learn from one another.” (Bethards, 2014, p. 65) This theory directly relates to the findings, as students at School XYZ indicated that their choices were based on a number of factors, some of which had social origins. To support this claim, one simply needs to review the factors that the students identified on their mind-maps (e.g., parents, teachers, college counselors, societal demands, and university prospects). However, as Barclay (1982) described in relation to social learning theory, behaviors can also be acquired by direct experience. Once again, turning to the mind-maps, these behaviors were exhibited by the students at School XYZ. Responses such as “skills I have or areas of strength” and “finding my balance between work and relaxing” are just two examples of how social learning theory applies to this study.

Discussion of Themes

Theme 1: Utility value. Bandura (1977) noted that students are more likely to adopt modeled behaviors if they are motivated by intrinsic or extrinsic factors. This directly supports
the first theme identified through this research, *Utility value*. Some students clearly expressed intrinsic motivation, which comes from inside an individual rather than from any external source. Students wanted to perform better for the sake of becoming better learners. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation refers to external factors, such as rewards or punishments. An example of this would be that students wanted better grades on their report cards or stronger academic credentials for their university applications. This concept is supported by Latham and Saari (1979), who stated that “laboratory experiments have shown that learning is achieved more effectively by informing observers in advance the consequences of engaging in a specific behavior than by waiting until the behavior is demonstrated and then administering the reinforcer” (p. 240).

To support these extrinsic factors, students are exposed throughout their high school careers to what the college counselors offer in many different settings. As soon as a student enters School XYZ, the college counselors sign them up to a system called Naviance. Naviance is a college and career readiness software that helps students align their strengths and interests to postsecondary goals and plans. This software also allows students to compare and contrast their courses, grades, and test scores with historical data on other students from School XYZ. Within this software, the college counselors can also enable features that students can use to help determine career interests and learning styles. The main goal of the college counselors is to help the students gain a better understanding of themselves, as students and as people, so that they can later make course selections that best reflect their abilities and goals.

Nagy, Trautwein, Baumert, Köller, and Garrett (2006) discussed the concept of intrinsic value in relation to course selection in secondary education. They used expectancy value theory to derive data that supported the idea that “academic self-concepts are closely connected to
achievement in the same domain” (Nagy et al., 2006, p. 324). This view is supported by the data gathered from students at School XYZ, as many students stated that they chose classes that they had previous success in as well as those in fields they would pursue at the university level.

Schnabel and Gruehn (2000) went on to support this idea of intrinsic value in secondary education and added that these decisions about course selection often determine a student’s future occupation. These predictor variables, self-concept and intrinsic values, also support having used Krumboltz’s social learning theory as a framework for this study.

Furthering this idea of *Utility value*, Marsh (1986) introduced the internal/external frame of reference model. This model elucidates patterns in student choices by highlighting that students compare their own achievements to those of their peers, which provides a framework for the students’ choices (Marsh, 1986). As part of this model, students consider themselves stronger in one domain than another, such as being more math-inclined or English-inclined (Marsh & Hau, 2004).

Unlike Marsh’s model, the expectancy-value model developed by Eccles and Wigfield (2002) “provides a useful theoretical framework for combining the influences of academic intrinsic values and expectancies of success as predictors of academic decision-making” (Nagy et al., 2006, p. 325) by focusing on how students’ behavior relates to their choices. In this model, the concept of “expectancies of success” is correlated to a student’s course choices. (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Simply put, students’ behavioral thought processes regarding their academic performance will parallel which course they choose. This model supports the research question for this study, as it aims to makes sense of a student’s choice.

**Theme 2: Relatedness.** “According to social learning theory, the influence of environmental events on the acquisition and regulation of behavior is largely determined by
cognitive processes which are based on prior experience.” (Price & Archbold, 1995, p. 1268)

This is exemplified in Hanna, Crittenden, and Crittenden’s (2013) multicultural study of influences on ethical behavior, where it was found that role models influenced and educated future leaders. In the case of School XYZ, these influencers were college counselors, teachers, and peers. “Humans are social beings, and therefore it is important to consider whether the sense of relatedness that can be derived from interpersonal experiences is enough to facilitate personal wellness and healthy social functioning.” (Niemiec, Soenens, & Vansteenkiste, 2014, p. 77)

Niemiec et al. (2014) outlined the following strategies that can be used to support relatedness:

- Take on a warm, empathic, and non-judgmental attitude toward the person.
- Provide a sense of unconditional positive concern.
- Communicate genuine care, interest, focus, and unconditional support toward the person.

These strategies could be used to describe the functions of the college counselors, teachers, and peers. Adopting these strategies has been shown to produce positive results for students when they are allowed to make their own choices, such as course selection (Roth, Assor, Niemiec, Ryan, & Deci, 2009).

According to a study conducted in the field of pediatric nursing (Betz, 2004), Relatedness is a concept that can be very complex and evolving. In the case of School XYZ, the students referenced the college counselors, teachers, and peers in different ways, with some factors having more influence than others. This study was conducted with students who were finishing their final year of study and the responses received may have been different if the study had been conducted with students who were just entering high school.

The concept of Relatedness can be found in other nursing studies. Crary (2016) spoke to
the idea that a rapport or relationship must be formed in order to best serve a patient. It is obvious that nursing and education are different fields; however, they share a central tenet of helping those who require assistance. For nursing, this assistance is physical. For education, this assistance is mental guidance. The students at School XYZ identified college counselors, teachers, and peers as helping them make sense of selecting courses because these connections were important to achieving their desired outcomes.

Moving away from the field of nursing, Relatedness is evident in our everyday life, as detailed by Nash (2005), whose anthropological work discusses “kinship as classificatory system and practice” (Nash, 2005, p. 449). Kinship, in the case of School XYZ, is represented by the subordinate theme of using peers to make sense of a student’s decision making. Nash goes on to describe “kinship thinking” (2005, p. 449). Some students at School XYZ stated that they made their decisions based upon what their friends thought or the classes that their friends were taking. Other students stated that they wanted to be different from their peers and chose a different path, which supports the claim by Haraway (1997) that we must learn to accept differences in order to move forward. Regardless of theory, it is clear that the students at School XYZ placed great emphasis on the formal and informal structures that created Relatedness in order to make sense of their course selection.

**Theme 3: Connecting choices to students’ backgrounds.** From the data gathered from the students at School XYZ, it is clear that the participants’ family and cultural backgrounds affected their sensemaking. Connecting new learning to previous learning, subordinate theme 3.1, can be seen in other studies, such as that of Valadez (2002). That study examined mathematics course selection among a group of Latino students. It supported the idea that “social capital is associated with more informed educational decisions” (Valadez, 2002, p. 319). The
word “informed” in that quotation is important, because students can only make a choice if they are aware of their options.

“McNeal (1999) suggested that the most important aspect of parental involvement in these decision-making processes is parent-child discussion.” (Valadez, 2002, p. 321) As stated in Chapter 4, the students at School XYZ referenced their parents many times as they tried to make sense of their course selection. School XYZ recognizes the important role that parents play and, because of this, offers evening presentations to parents in an attempt to help them understand the complexities of the educational systems offered at School XYZ.

Valadez (2002) discussed how students at a higher socioeconomic status statistically enroll in higher-level courses more often than students at a lower socioeconomic status. While this was not investigated in this study of students at School XYZ, an expensive private school, the idea of socioeconomic status is interesting. Valadez (2002) also discussed the importance of other variables on course selection, such as older siblings, single parent households, and first-generation college-bound students.

The idea of connecting choices to a student’s background can be linked to the transfer of knowledge. Bransford and Schwartz (1999) argued that rather than looking at what is actually transferred, it is more important to investigate how that transfer of knowledge prepares the student for future learning. This can also be linked to subordinate theme 3.2, Modeling how choices are made. This is not a simple process, however.

Bandura (1977) identified four required phases of enactment in order for the modeled behavior to be reproduced: (1) Cognitive organization, (2) initiation, (3) monitoring, and (4) refinement based on feedback…Observations cannot be correctly reproduced without providing opportunities for the learner to implement all four phases of enactment.
(Bethards, 2014, p. 66)

Reproducing behavior does not necessarily indicate that the behavior is learned, however. Goodwin, Hurwitz, Smith, and Fox (2015) discovered that there was a link between the college choices that were made by siblings. Once again, socioeconomic differences were not considered in this study, but the findings indicated that students who were less informed, and thus were more likely to make questionable decisions, had a higher tendency to follow the path created by an older sibling. This was true for some of the students at School XYZ, who emphasized the importance of an older sibling in their decision-making. Other students expressed this in a similar fashion, but labeled it as family expectations. However it is labeled, an underlying theme that emerged is the students’ lack of research into their choices when they can rely on modeled behavior.

**Recommendations for Practice**

Even with all of the educational theories and practices available in schools today, “career development learning has largely been provided in relation to school to work transition rather than as comprehensive developmental programs beginning in preschool and provided to all children and adolescents.” (W. Patton & McMahon, 2014, p.323)

Ultimately, the recommendations for practice involve understanding the current sense making of students in order to become better at motivating future students to make more informed decisions. As secondary schools are at the center of development for young people (W. Patton & McMahon, 2014), it is vital that guidance to these students is relevant and effective. Practical implications for secondary schools identified through this study include: (a) introduce the role of Grade 9/10 college and career counselor, (b) better use of examples, (c) become a role model, and (d) awareness of external factors and circumstances.
According to Advancing Access (2016), an organization of 24 universities that work directly with schools and other educational institutions, students apply the following decision-making framework to make sense of course selection:

**Figure 3.** Student decision-making framework according to Advancing Access (2016).

The third step of this framework, “setting personalised criteria,” touches upon a very important component of the overall recommendations for practice: personalization. While some of the information that students need to make sense of their decisions can be distributed en masse, this process is ultimately one that requires individual attention. Not until a school has adequate resources, including the time to devote to these recommendations, will outcomes be affected by these recommendations.

**Grade 9/10 college and career counselor.** In keeping with the idea of personalization, as well as providing a comprehensive program, it is recommended that School XYZ introduce the role of a Grade 9/10 college and career counselor. According to Samantha, the discussions that she had with her college counselor in grade 10 were critical in her course selection as well as the career preparation (personal communication, June 16, 2017). The priority of the three current college counselors is on the successful completion of high school and everything that accompanies the transition from high school to university or an alternative. With an ever-
growing school population, more and more of the college counselors’ time is being spent on the procedural aspects of applying to university, such as standardized testing and fulfilling admission requirements. In his interview, Marc discussed how important the interactions with his counselors were for him, but that they were mostly limited to the fall of his senior year (personal communication, May 17, 2017). However, as stated by W. Patton & McMahon (2014), college and career readiness begins before Grades 11 and 12.

As stated by many of the participants, college counselors helped students make sense of their decisions. However, given that these students only started meeting with the college counselors in Grade 11, one can only imagine the impact that another counselor who was solely focused on those earlier years could have. For example, in her interview, Emma discussed how she had to make a special effort in grade 10 to find and speak to a College Counselor about her course selections (personal communication, May 30, 2017). In an effort to remain a comprehensive unit, this role should be housed within the College Counselling Office and still work with a small number of students throughout their university applications.

According to the International Association for College Admission Counselling (2017) and a college counselor at the United World College in Singapore, choosing a counseling model at an international school is not a one-size-fits-all scenario. It stated:

There may not be one right or wrong model and in most cases, we would agree that it depends on your student body, the parent population, the culture in which you work, and the expectations of your head of school or board. Seemingly, at the core of each office, no matter which model is being used, is the desire to support students in all areas of their development, reinforcing the idea that collaboration among stakeholders is essential. (International Association for College Admission Counselling, 2017)
At this point in time, it is recommended that a Grade 9/10 college and career counselor be added at School XYZ. With this said, it is important to remember that the demands of the students and school culture might change this position, and that of the entire office, in years to come.

**Better use of examples.** When speaking with Nick during the interview stage of this study, the topic of using examples was raised. When trying to make sense of his course selection, Nick talked about going on YouTube to find examples of what taking economics in high school would be like (personal communication, May 22, 2017). This is not a practice that is recommended by School XYZ, but the student took the initiative to use this tool as he attempted to make sense of the course selection process. According to educational theory, “it is important that instructors employ engaging pedagogical methods in the classroom” (Leukefeld, 2011, p.318). Using a selection of different approaches to actively engage students in the classroom is commonplace, thus it is the recommendation of this study that these techniques become incorporated into the course selection process for students at School XYZ.

Information sharing is everywhere, but looking elsewhere is not always required. Each year, School XYZ has approximately 150 students successfully graduate and transition to higher education. These students, who range in ability and drive, attend all sorts of universities throughout the world and can easily serve as examples for future generations of students. However, the information about these successful students is not shared with younger students at School XYZ. Rather, if they are fortunate, students can turn to older siblings in an attempt to make sense of their decisions. Providing examples and references for students going through this process will ensure that all students, regardless of having siblings or not, are given enough information to assess their options and make a decision.
In addition to in-house examples, as described by Nick, other examples that are easily accessed can improve how students make sense of their decision. It should be the responsibility of School XYZ to provide a selection of these examples to their students.

**Become a role model.** According to Holmegaard, Madsen, and Ulriksen (2014), there is a general concern regarding the lack of students choosing to study STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) during their further education. This is particularly true among young women who do not have role models they can look up to (Bamberger, 2014). As shown by the results of this study, it is clear that students are looking towards the adult figures in their lives for guidance. Whether these people are teachers, college counselors, or parents, the need for role models is noticeable.

One day each year, School XYZ hosts a program called Career Day, during which the Parent-Student Organization organizes industry professionals to speak to the students. Approximately 30 professionals from all walks of life are given the opportunity to present their occupations and what it takes to succeed in their given field. Students sign up for three small group presentations throughout the course of the day. Feedback from the event, which has been running for many years, is always very positive. It is the recommendation of this study that this role-modeling program be expanded.

Rather than a one-and-done approach to role-modeling, expanding this program to one that has many touch points throughout a student’s education would certainly benefit students and their sense-making. While logistically this may be quite difficult and require additional resources, possibly including the Grade 9/10 college and career counselor, exposing students to professional networks and settings will surely help students understand the professional marketplace. Even if a student decides not to pursue the field in which he or she has been
assigned a role model, the student will still become exposed to the approach to work and professionalism.

This is just one example of a recommendation regarding how role models can be used to help students make sense of their course selections. With the resources that are available to School XYZ, including a strong alumni and parent network, there are surely many ways to integrate more positive role models into students’ lives. Thus, this approach will help them make sense of not just their course selection decisions, but greater decisions that may have a lasting impact on their future education and career.

**Awareness of external factors and circumstances.** At School XYZ, there are dedicated social-emotional counselors as well as procedures and teams that have been established to look after students’ well-being. The study findings make it clear that the factors and circumstances that affect a student outside of the school environment are just as important as those that happen during the school day. Because of this, it is recommended that School XYZ integrate these well-being methods into the academic sector. Currently, information is distributed to students in a compartmentalized manner. Lessons and themes have a silo effect.

School XYZ has an advisory program in which groups of students meet with their advisors (academic teachers and staff) every day for at least 10 minutes. During this time, the advisors follow a curriculum that has been established by the administration. One week may focus on managing stress, the next week may center on careers, and so on. However, these themes are not connected or built upon one another. Given that the advisors meet with the same students every day and are charged with building rapport with them, one would assume that these meetings would be an appropriate time to support students in making sense of their course selection. Unfortunately, advisors are given no training in how to do this.
Just the other day, the researcher, in his role as a college counselor, went to a Grade 10 advisory classroom to discuss the upcoming process of course selection. During this meeting, the researcher had asked the students whether they had older siblings that had gone through this process. When one young woman was asked who her older sibling was, the room advisor stated that he had no idea that she had a sibling. To complicate matters, the advisor taught her older sibling. When the advisory program was established, it was probably assumed that the advisors would naturally discover these connections and be able to use them to help students make sense of their decisions. However, as clearly demonstrated by this example, this is simply not happening. It may be possible to better help students make sense of their course selections by training the advisors to understand that academics and well-being are not two separate entities, but are actually two concepts that are enmeshed within one another.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

In a seemingly ever-changing world of education, the opportunities for future research with this project seem almost endless. Some of the ideas for future research that have developed from this study are presented here.

One could duplicate this study with more students, including different age groups. To keep this study manageable, 10 students were interviewed. However, because there is so much diversity at School XYZ, it may be beneficial to repeat this study with more participants in order to obtain richer data. Also, it could be possible to have a longer-term study in which students are interviewed as they enter high school and again when they exit. This would provide data that can compare a student’s learning and sense-making skills over the 4 years that she or he spends at School XYZ.
Another study could interview students who have already graduated and spent a year at college or in the work force. Once a student has graduated from School XYZ, she or he may look back at that time differently. Also, the graduate may feel more open to providing candid responses when no longer associated with the school. This study could be rolled into the previous one as another point in time when the participants are interviewed.

Future research could provide the findings from this study to the factors identified in the themes in an attempt to improve their support of students during the course selection. This will require an additional study on each factor. As the goal of education should be to prepare students for when they leave school, the data gathered from this research should be shared with those factors that have been identified by the participants of this study. Then, using the data gathered, devise a study that can measure the perceived effectiveness of these factors.

This research was completed at a private international secondary school in England. Further research could replicate this study at a public school and also in another country. Research such as this can get overlooked at the underfunded schools where the results from may be most useful to the administration.

For this study, it was important to have a 50/50 split of young men and women. However, throughout the study, differences between the two genders became somewhat apparent. As this was not the focus of the study, these differences were not examined, but future research could focus on gender differences.

School XYZ is an affluent school and there were few socioeconomic differences between the students. However, this is not to say that there are no differences at all in socioeconomic status. Another future study could separate groups of students by status to investigate how their
responses may differ in an effort to determine how socioeconomic status influences how students make sense of their decisions.

Future research could examine whether students who go to university as an undecided or undeclared major make sense of their decisions about course selection in high school differently than those who apply directly into a major. Similarly, future research could investigate differences between students planning to attend university in the United States versus the United Kingdom. University-bound students in the UK need to apply directly into a course of study, which was referenced by some of the participants.

Finally, future research could isolate AP from IB and conduct the same study to see whether there are differences in the way that students in each group make sense of the decisions they make regarding their course selections.

**Conclusion: What Next?**

As it has been a few years since the researcher has attended high school, this study has allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding of what goes on in the mind of a high school student. This is especially important because developing rapport with the students the researcher works with aids in the overall effectiveness of the work being conducted.

From the knowledge gained from the findings of this study, it is possible for the researcher to make some immediate changes in his general dealings with students. For example, the researcher is currently working with a group of Grade 10 students on their course selections. Grade 10 is a particularly important year because it is when students need to choose whether they want to follow the full IB Diploma Program. When the researcher is having conversations with these students, he can be mindful of the information gathered from this research and address the
factors that influence student decisions. For instance, it will be even more important for the researcher to find out a student’s background before he can offer advice and support.

In addition, this information has the potential to help others with the same job and responsibilities as the researcher. There are three college counselors at School XYZ. Throughout the researcher’s tenure, it has been the school’s goal to make the process more comprehensive, meaning that the counselors work with students from as early as Grade 9 to help them make sense of their decisions in high school and better prepare them for future study or employment. If the information from this study were kept to the researcher alone, it would have little impact on the culture of the school. However, if it is disseminated to the other counselors, there is the opportunity to change the behaviors of the counselors to better serve the students.

Therefore, the next step is to present these findings to the administration at School XYZ. At School XYZ, the hierarchical structure of the organization is divided into two sides, academic and pastoral. Pastoral care revolves around the well-being of students. However, as shown by the results of this study, the two sides are intertwined. The manners in which students make sense of their academic decisions all have very personal and emotional factors behind them. If the administration understands these connections, it then can use this information to make procedural changes at the highest level within the school.

With all of these changes that are possible at School XYZ, it is important to recognize that this study is not unique. Rather, School XYZ is just one of hundreds, if not thousands, of international schools around the world that offer multiple curricula. There are opportunities to present the findings of this study at conferences that are focused on issues such as the one at the heart of this study. Organizations such as the Council of International Schools and International Association for College Admission Counseling are just two that welcome session proposals for
their annual membership meetings. It is possible to take the findings of this study to a global audience.

Whatever the case may be, it is certain that this study does not end with the submission of a paper or a defense of a dissertation. Rather, there is work to be done and this study provides just a small step in improving education for future generations of students.
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Appendix A: IRB Approval

NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION

Date: April 5, 2017
IRB #: CPS17-03-08
Principal Investigator(s): Shannon Alpert
Ryan Hinchey
Department: Doctor of Education Program
College of Professional Studies
Address: 20 Belvidere
Northeastern University
Title of Project: How Do High School Students Make Sense of their Experience of Selecting High School Courses?
Participating Sites: [permission in file]
DHHS Review Category: Expedited #6, #7
Informed Consents: One (1) signed consent form
Monitoring Interval: 12 months

APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: APRIL 4, 2018

Investigator’s Responsibilities:
1. The informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any other university approvals that may be necessary.

[Signature]
C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

[Signature]
Nan C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University FWA #4630
Appendix B: Recruitment Email

Recruiting Script

Hello, my name is Ryan Hinchey. I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University in the Graduate School of Education. I am conducting research on making sense of high school course selection at ‘School XYZ’ and I am inviting you to participate because you are a graduating student from this school.

Participation in this research includes an interview about your high school course selection experience, which will take approximately 45 minutes – 1 hour. Your participation is voluntary; you can refuse to answer questions that you do not wish to answer and you can stop participation at any time. Participating in this study will not result in any form of compensation for you. All names will be kept confidential and audiotapes and transcriptions will be kept confidential until they are destroyed at a later date.

If you have any questions or would like to participate in the research, I can be reached at Hinchey.r@husky.neu.edu or by phone at 07552 030907.
Appendix C: Signed Informed Consent Document

Signed Informed Consent Document

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies

Name of Investigators: Principal Investigator, Dr. Shannon Alpert, Student Researcher, Ryan Hinchey

Title of Project: How do High School Students Make Sense of their Experience Selecting High School Courses?

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

We are asking you to be in this study because you are a 2017 graduate of School XYZ.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this research is to explore why students choose their high school curriculum at School XYZ and the perceived impact of this choice.

What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to have an interview with Ryan Hinchey, student at Northeastern University. The interview will last for approximately 1 hour and will be conducted using GoToMeeting (online meeting software). During the interview, you will be asked questions about your high school academic experience and will ask you to reflect on how that experience has impacted your further education.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?

You will be interviewed in your own home at a time that is convenient for you. The interview will take about one hour.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?

There should be no foreseeable risk or discomfort to you involved with this study.
Will I benefit by being in this research?

There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study. However, the information learned from this study may help future students at School XYZ have a better understanding of their course selection.

Who will see the information about me?

Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being of this project.

All audio recordings will be stored on the researcher’s secure computer. Written transcripts will be stored in a locked cabinet for six months after the defense of this study. At the end of six months, the written transcripts will be destroyed and the electronic copy will be deleted. During the interview and subsequent recordings and transcripts, students’ names will be omitted and in the place of names will be numbers (i.e. Student 1, Student 2, etc.).

In rare instances, authorized people may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. We would only permit people who are authorized by organizations such as the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board to see this information.

No special arrangements will be made for compensation or for payment for treatment solely because of my participation in this research.

Can I stop my participation in this study?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Ryan Hinchey (Hinchey.r@husky.neu.edu/+/44(0)7552 030907), the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. Shannon Alpert (s.alpert@northeastern.edu), the Principal Investigator.

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 490 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

Will I be paid for my participation?

You will be not be paid to complete the study.

Will it cost me anything to participate?

You will not incur any foreseeable costs to participate in this study.
Is there anything else I need to know?

You must be at least 18 years old to participate unless your parent or guardian gives written permission.

I agree to take part in this research.

Signature of person agreeing to take part                                  Date

Printed name of person above

....................................................................................................................

Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent                                  Date

Printed name of person above

.....................................................................................................................
Appendix D: Document Portraits of the 10 interviews

The following color code represents the super-ordinate themes as they are found in the following document portraits:

- Utility Value
- Connecting choices to students' backgrounds
- Relatedness
Document Portrait Interview 1
Document Portrait Interview 2

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- Red lines indicate key points or highlights.
- Green areas represent sections for further analysis or notes.
Document Portrait Interview 4

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Legend:
- Blue: Data
- Green: Analysis
- Red: Findings
Appendix E: Student Mind-Maps

The 10 students completed this mind map in preparation for their interviews.

Student 1:
Student 2:
Student 3:
Student 4:

Mind Map Template

- Career choice of medicine
- Uncertainty over where to study university
- Liked the sciences
- Enjoyed challenges

Nami
Student 5:

- My personal desire to take certain classes
- Conversations with parents
- My school guidance counselor
- University opinions on courses
- The teacher of a certain course
- Conversations with parents
- My personal desire to take certain classes
Student 6:
Student 7:
Student 8:

Mind Map Template

- Teachers' picture of the subject
- Friends
- This "girl"
- The lack of selection
- Parents
Student 9:
Student 10:
Appendix F: Transcriptions of Student Interviews

Interview 1
Interviewer: Ryan Hinchey
Student: “Student 1”

Ryan Hinchey
Hello, “Student 1”.

Student 1
Hello.

Ryan Hinchey
Could you please state your name for the record?

Student 1
I am “Student 1”.

Ryan Hinchey
You are currently a senior at “SCHOOL XYZ”.

Student 1
Yes.

Ryan Hinchey
Could you please state your citizenship?

Student 1
I am a dual citizen; I have both British and American citizenship.

Ryan Hinchey
Since we have talked about this before, you are aware that this is for my doctoral dissertation at Northeastern; the topic of the presentation is ‘Students’ course choices and how they make sense of their selecting courses at “SCHOOL XYZ”’. Today we are just going to go over a few things. I previously had you do the mind-map; we will start talking about that and then we will go onto some more questions that I have for you. This session is being recorded; you will have access to both the transcription and recording afterwards, if you want them. It will be stored for a period of time afterwards, and then destroyed. All names and everything else will be kept confidential, so there is nothing that you need to worry about. Your name will not be tied to anything; nobody will see it except for me and my advisor. Hopefully you should feel free to say anything you want; this is no
reflection on you as a Student 1 at "SCHOOL XYZ", but just purely for the purposes of the dissertation. Do you have any questions at this time?

**Student 1**
I think I am okay.

**Ryan Hinchey**
You can stop if you feel uncomfortable at any time. If there are any questions that you have during this, let me know and we will proceed accordingly. If you do not have any questions then we will move right into the mind-map. Do you have your copy in front of you?

**Student 1**
Yes.

**Ryan Hinchey**
Looking at the mind-map with your name in the middle and the template that was provided, you have filled out the circles of influence around your name. I would like to talk to you a little bit about each of these. Is there one that you would like to start with?

**Student 1**
I do not really mind. We could start at the top and go around.

**Ryan Hinchey**
Okay, so let's start with parents.

**Student 1**
Parents are kind of important, so I put them on there.

**Ryan Hinchey**
That makes sense. So you lived with both of your parents, correct?

**Student 1**
Yes.

**Ryan Hinchey**
You have put parents as one of the areas of two-way communication and influence. Can you explain why you put it there, and why you put it as a two-way influence?

**Student 1**
Yes, I definitely had to make sure I put parents on there because I talk to my parents all the time. They know me pretty well and they have my best interests at heart because they are my parents, but if I was to talk to my mum about what classes I wanted to take she would tell me to do what was best for myself. She would never tell me what to do and I would
definitely have a say in what classes I wanted to take. It’s a two-way one since there is definitely a relationship there between them trying to give advice, but not just telling me what to do.

**Ryan Hinchey**

Have you felt this has been a two-way conversation throughout your entire education, since when you have started to choose classes?

**Student 1**

Yes, definitely.

**Ryan Hinchey**

Is there one parent that is more involved on a personal level?

**Student 1**

I think my mum would probably be more involved, just because she does not work; she is a stay-at-home mum, while my dad is usually working throughout the day. I will come home and I will talk to my mum because we are pretty close, so she knows me better than anybody else and gives me advice for what she thinks is best.

**Ryan Hinchey**

When you talk to your mum about your courses, what topics come up? What concerns does she have that you talk about?

**Student 1**

My mum understands what kind of student I am, so she wants to make sure that I am challenging myself enough without overwhelming myself. She knows that sometimes I can try and take on too much, so she helps me to find that balance where I do not overwhelm myself but that I am also challenged in education.

**Ryan Hinchey**

Do you also talk about your future goals?

**Student 1**

Yes, she knows my interests and what I want to do when I am older. She knows I am not a huge fan of math, so she will say, 'You can take a hard math class but you do not have to worry too much about where it is going to lead.'

**Ryan Hinchey**

Moving on to the next circle which is your college counsellor; for the record I will state that I also serve as your college counsellor. This may be a little weird. This is a two-way
conversation as well; can you tell me about your dealings with your college counsellor and how that has helped shape your course selection?

**Student 1**

Yes. I remember before I was going to be a junior I went to make sure I knew what classes to take to make sure I seemed competitive as an applicant for college in the future. I went to talk to you about it and you advised me knowing the kind of universities I was looking for, and what they were looking for as colleges. So that helped put me in the right direction in terms of finding the right type of classes to take.

**Ryan Hinchey**

Would you say that your future university prospects were a major contributor to your courses that you took at “SCHOOL XYZ”?

**Student 1**

Yes, definitely. I feel like it pushed me to take more Advanced Placement (AP) classes than regular classes.

**Ryan Hinchey**

Just to be clear, you are completing the AP programme?

**Student 1**

Yes.

**Ryan Hinchey**

How many AP classes will you have finished by the time that you graduate?

**Student 1**

I would have taken eight by the time I have graduated, with one International Baccalaureate (IB) class.

**Ryan Hinchey**

What IB class is that?

**Student 1**

IB art, visual arts.

**Ryan Hinchey**

Why did you choose IB visual arts instead of an AP art class?

**Student 1**

The IB art class at “SCHOOL XYZ” is generally known to be the hardest degree of art you can take, and as someone who really likes art it’s just something I like to do: to push myself into
trying the hardest art class that was available to me. I feel like it also helped me learn a lot about art.

**Ryan Hinchey**
Other than that you feel like the AP classes are more suited to your learning style?

**Student 1**
Yes, definitely.

**Ryan Hinchey**
Why do you think that is?

**Student 1**
The IB programme is extremely structured; you have to take a certain amount of classes and choose your higher levels. It is all for two years, and at the end of the two years you take an exam for those past two years; to me that seemed crazy because I do not have the patience to sit and do an exam covering the last two years. That seems overwhelming to me so I liked AP, being able to choose what classes I wanted to take based on my personal preferences, and then sit the exam after one year of learning material.

**Ryan Hinchey**
These are conversations that you had with your college counsellor?

**Student 1**
Yes.

**Ryan Hinchey**
Great. Moving on to the next circle, you talk about other students. How have other students influenced your course selections?

**Student 1**
I almost did not put this one, but I thought I would to cover all different influences. I think on my mind-map this was the least amount of influence, because other students would say, ‘Do not take this class because it is hard,’ or, ‘Take this one because it is easy.’ You could then get tests which are not that hard. The more you stay in high-school you realise that everyone is different, so therefore someone may find something easy that you find really hard. It is definitely a relationship because they would say, ‘What do you like?’, and I would reply, ‘Well, I like English,’ so they would say, ‘Take this English class.’

**Ryan Hinchey**
Have you ever taken any class because you specifically knew that someone else has done or not done it?
Student 1
I do not think so. I have always been pretty independent in my choices; if I wanted to take a class either I did or I did not.

Ryan Hinchey
That is good. We feel at “SCHOOL XYZ” there is a lot of talk about course selection with other students.

Student 1
Possibly not course selection, just maybe about classes people are taking. ‘I’m in this math,’ and other people would say, ‘I’m in senior[?] level math versus higher level match versus pre-calc,’ and everyone discusses the degree of difficulty of these classes.

Ryan Hinchey
That probably leads into the next circle, which is the teachers who teach those classes. Do the students talk about that?

Student 1
Yes, definitely. I have heard some cases where I will hear a student talking to another Student 1bout, ‘Don’t take this class because so-and-so teaches it and makes it really hard,’ or something like that. ‘Take this class because this person does teach it, and hopefully you get this teacher.’ It has a lot to do with how the teachers teach a class to how much you get out of it.

Ryan Hinchey
On that one you’ve indicated the arrow is the one way influence from the teachers to you.

Student 1
Yes, definitely. I am not going to walk up to my teacher and say, ‘You don’t teach well, therefore I am not going to take your class.’ That is kind of disrespectful. It is not really a relationship, because I am not talking to them about why I am or am not taking a class; it is more just because of their general teaching strategies that I take or prefer not to take a class.

Ryan Hinchey
Have you found that you have taken classes again with the same teacher because you liked their teaching style? If you have that option do you try and stick with the same teacher, if possible?

Student 1
I do not think I have ever had that option, but I feel if I knew I got along really well with the teacher, they taught the class well and I felt like I had learned a lot from them then I would definitely want to take that class again or have that same teacher.
Ryan Hinchey
When do you find out who is teaching your classes for the following year?

Student 1
Usually the first day of school; it depends on whether a teacher teaches multiple classes or if a class has multiple teachers. Usually you find out who your teacher is on the first day of school when you are handed your schedule.

Ryan Hinchey
Have you ever switched a class once you have found out who your teacher was?

Student 1
No, I do not think I ever have. It has never gotten to that point where I thought, ‘No,’ as a specific teacher was teaching it.

Ryan Hinchey
We briefly touched upon your learning style before; you liked the less structured way of learning, is that correct? Is that what you said earlier?

Student 1
Yes, or just the ability to be able to choose what kind of things I wanted to take and not feel like I needed to follow a certain structure for what classes I had to take.

Ryan Hinchey
As the AP does not have the different streams that you have to follow what I like to call the pieces of the pie within the IB programme; that you take each category within the IB programme. You prefer the AP programme where you can pick and choose what you take, is that correct?

Student 1
Yes, definitely.

Ryan Hinchey
Have you found yourself taking more of one type of subject than another?

Student 1
Yes, I definitely tended to take more Humanity-based classes; I prefer English, arts and sometimes history more than I would take math or science, just because of what I prefer.

Ryan Hinchey
You like things where there is more writing involved, would you say that is one of your strengths?
Student 1

Yes, I would definitely say that I was a pretty decent writer. I am not necessarily bad at math or science, but at the end of the day it is just about what I like to do best.

Ryan Hinchey

When you think of the courses at “SCHOOL XYZ” do you find that some of them lend themselves – other than the humanities, social sciences and English classes – do you there is a difference between the AP programme and the IB programme, and the amount of writing? You have taken an IB course before; were there ever thoughts of doing more IB courses such as IB English, or were you pretty set on doing the AP English courses?

Student 1

I definitely thought about it at one point just because I knew I liked it; that’s why I think I was ready to devote two years to taking IB art, because I knew I liked art, I knew I would be in it for the two years and I knew I would enjoy it. I think I would definitely do the IB course for English or a humanities course, because I know I wouldn’t get bored or impatient with it. I do not think I would commit to two years of doing a biology course.

Ryan Hinchey

At the end of the courses they have the exams, so you will be taking AP exams at the end of this year and you have already taken some AP exams at the end of last year. Do you feel that your learning style lends itself nicely to those exams? Is there an exam for IB art or is it just a portfolio review?

Student 1

I find that I am good with multiple choice in working intuitively and quickly; that has worked out well for AP where you are sometimes only given 40 minutes to write an entire essay after reading a passage of prose, which has definitely helped me. For IB art I just had to upload pictures of exhibition work; there is not one set exam; it is more doing different things over two years such as documenting your process and making your pieces; that goes into a slideshow which is called your process portfolio, which you then upload. You do a comparative study where you compare two or three different artworks and upload that as well; that goes with your exhibition work, so it is more pieces of the pie going all together to get a single grade, like you said.

Ryan Hinchey

When you take the AP exam, even though you talked about having some flexibility within the course choices, once you choose your AP course how flexible is the course itself? For example if you are taking an AP English course, once you enter the course how flexible do you find the course work once you enter it?

Student 1

What do you mean by course work? Homework, tests...?
Ryan Hinchey

Yes, so everything that you do within the course. Homework, tests, the content that you cover within the course; is that flexible? Are you made aware of what you will be studying throughout the course of the year?

Student 1

I am in an AP English course right now; I am in AP literature, and this year it has been quite unstructured where I don’t know what we are really going to be doing next, and I do not know how much I have necessarily liked that. In years past it has been quite structured as in AP you have to go really fast as it is a one-year course; it is a college level course, therefore you have to go fast. It is structured in the way that you need to make sure that you keep on time and finish the curriculum in order to be completely prepared for the exam.

Ryan Hinchey

To sum up that circle we are talking about the flexibility to choose your courses within the programme itself rather than the flexibility within the course itself. You like to be able to choose what courses you are doing within AP, and your learning style fits within the fact that you can choose courses rather than being prescribed six standard courses within the IB programme.

Student 1

Yes, certainly.

Ryan Hinchey

Fair to say. The next circle is your intended career, ideas and paths. What is your intended career?

Student 1

I initially wrote ideas and paths because I do not actually know what I want to do when I am older. I have general ideas; as you can probably sense from earlier on in the interview, I am more of a creatively minded person, I like to write and do arts. I definitely want to integrate that in my career; I could never sit down at a desk and compute numbers for eight hours a day. It is why taking math or science courses have never been as important in my head for myself and what I wanted to do for my future. I realise I forgot to draw an arrow for this one.

Ryan Hinchey

How would you draw the arrow for this one?

Student 1

I would probably draw the arrow just coming from the bubble towards me, because I cannot really have a relationship with – well, I guess it is kind of a two-way relationship.
Actually no, I would reverse that; I would put the arrow from me to the intended career ideas path, because it is just my own opinions and thoughts.

**Ryan Hinchey**

Tell me about your plans after you graduate “SCHOOL XYZ”.

**Student 1**

After I graduate from “SCHOOL XYZ” I know I am going to Boston College for four years. I do not have an intended major; I applied Undecided, so I am trying to decide what I am going to major in.

**Ryan Hinchey**

Do you think it will be somewhere in the social sciences, humanities? Do you have an inkling of possibly what you want to do while you are there?

**Student 1**

I know they have pretty strong communications and arts programmes. I might do a major in communications and a minor in art.

**Ryan Hinchey**

When you were thinking about your future after “SCHOOL XYZ” those things came into play, going to a university with good programmes in communications and art. Is that correct?

**Student 1**

Oh yes.

**Ryan Hinchey**

Other than the courses that you took at “SCHOOL XYZ” were there any other indicators that told you that you would be good at these courses? Or is it just something that happened organically, that you found out that you liked these courses?

**Student 1**

I think it was definitely more organic in that I have always liked history and English from a very young age, I’ve always liked to draw, so it has just grown as a passion as I have gotten older.

**Ryan Hinchey**

Do you feel like the course selection at “SCHOOL XYZ” has helped foster that? That there have been enough courses for you to take, that you have had an experience to see these courses and what they are, if you wanted to study them later on?
Student 1
Yes, I think so. There are many different options for what you can take; there are lots of different social sciences, I could take an AP[R?] or IB[R?] depending on which one I wanted to, so there are lots of different choices.

Ryan Hinchey
Moving onto the next one, the personal interests; start by saying what some of your personal interests are.

Student 1
We have kind of covered this as we have talked about different sections. My personal interests are I like art; I like to be creative so therefore I knew that I wanted to take those kinds of classes.

Ryan Hinchey
Have there been any courses that have not aligned with your personal interests that you have taken just because you felt you needed to take?

Student 1
Yes, as a junior I took AP biology which I knew – I wanted to make sure I had a science to show I had a proficiency in even things I was not personally interested in, so I took that as a junior.

Ryan Hinchey
Why did you take AP biology instead of a regular level biology course or an IB course?

Student 1
I took AP biology because – I knew I was taking AP classes, so I knew what it entailed in order to take those courses. I have just lost my train of thought.

Ryan Hinchey
Do you feel the level of coursework was appropriate in AP biology even though it did not align up to your interests?

Student 1
Yes, I felt like I could definitely handle the work. I knew it was the course that was at the right level for me, even though it was not really for my personal interests.

Ryan Hinchey
Just to be clear, when did you start taking AP courses? Do you take AP Euro[?] in 10th grade?
Student 1
Yes, I did.

Ryan Hinchey
That was your introduction to AP courses; when you took AP Euro in 10th grade, did that help you make your decision about what you then studied in either AP or IB?

Student 1
Yes, I think that definitely came into account, because in comparison of me to other students some people could not work at the speed that AP Euro requires, as far as [inaudible] with the work and being personally accountable for all of it. They would either go on to IB, which is a more spread-out course over two years or they would take regular history classes, but I found that AP Euro was a good enough speed for me and that I got a lot out of the course over the year.

Ryan Hinchey
Do you think if they offered a pre-IB course in 10th grade – and that you had taken it – it would have influenced your decision to take AP or IB in 11th and 12th grade?

Student 1
Probably, and maybe if I had taken that one I would have ended up with IB, but...

Ryan Hinchey
Okay. Are there any other interests that you want to talk about, any non-academic interests that may have shaped your course selections? Have you thought about balancing your outside requirements with academics, and did that...

Student 1
Oh, yes. Yes, I have always been in sports and outside clubs. I have been taking AP classes – I know some people who take up to six in a year, and I do not understand how they can do that; in order to make sure I could balance workload, school and also my social life, I could only have taken a certain number before I guess I would have completely overwhelmed myself.

Ryan Hinchey
That sort of goes back to the flexibility of the AP programme and what you want to be comfortable with.

Student 1
Yes.
Ryan Hinchey
That is good. How much work do you put into the programme? On average how many hours in a given week are you spending outside of the classroom doing homework and preparing for tests?

Student 1
In a given week I probably do between two and three hours of homework a night, depending on the school day I had. Some days, especially as a senior I would have a lot less classes per day; I could have between three or six so it kind of varied a lot but I would still go home and do some work for the class, just to make sure I kept up.

Ryan Hinchey
You would probably spend 15 to 20 hours a week doing work outside of the classroom?

Student 1
Yes.

Ryan Hinchey
You felt that that amount of time doing that work outside of the classroom was a good balance with the other things that you were doing.

Student 1
Yes, I felt like it was definitely manageable. I feel like it was definitely more manageable in senior year than junior year, where I was still figuring out how to make sure I had a balance between varsity sports and clubs and then all these classes that I was still getting used to. I definitely got in my stride into how to manage my time best, so it has been fine.

Ryan Hinchey
Moving on to your last circle, your sister. Tell me about your sister and how she has influenced your courses.

Student 1
My sister and I are pretty similar in that we both take AP and have similar interests in sports and clubs. I am going to the same university as her, she is a sophomore at Boston College right now so it helped me when she was a senior and I was a sophomore; she sat down with me and helped to plan out which courses she thought it would be helpful for me to take, based on the fact she knew the different workloads and things like that. She was a student who understood me so I felt like the best – she was able to help me sort out my classes so that I was not overwhelmed with work depending on how much work was required for each class, if that makes sense.
Ryan Hinchey

Yes. Just to be clear she is two years older than you, she also graduated from “SCHOOL XYZ” and while she was at “SCHOOL XYZ” she took the AP programme, is that correct?

Student 1

Yes.

Ryan Hinchey

Did you ever ask her why she took the AP programme and not the IB programme?

Student 1

I do not think I ever asked her directly but I was usually in the room when I heard her talking about it; she also talked to my mum and my dad about which courses...I also think that in her learning style, she was definitely more of an AP student than she was an IB student.

Ryan Hinchey

Good. Is there anything else that you wanted to talk about on the mind-map, or any other circle that from this conversation you maybe thought, ‘I should have put that,’ or, ‘I maybe should not have put that’? Is there anything that you feel should be added or subtracted before we move on?

Student 1

No, I feel like this kind of covers everything that went into my decisions.

Ryan Hinchey

So we will move off that; I have a few other questions that I would like to ask you. The first one, I just want you to generally tell me about a time when you had to choose between several classes; so you sit down, you have your course selection guide in front of you, tell me about how you go about making that decision. I know that we sort of touched on this, but tell me about your thought process and how you sit down and make the decision to say, ‘I’m going to do this course instead of that course,’ when you have all these courses laid out in front of you.

Student 1

So when evaluating different courses that I think I would want to take versus not wanting to take I look at degree of difficulty of the class, so that definitely factors in how competitive it would make me look as an applicant to college. That would be me comparing a regular mathematics course with an AP mathematics course; immediately the AP one would definitely be more of a challenge which I like, and it also shows that I like to challenge myself so I would choose that one or that would also factor into me wanting to choose that one. What else? I definitely feel like the other classes I know I am going to take – I knew I definitely wanted to take an AP English course, so I would know I would have to
balance that work with an AP maths course or an AP science course. I would always look at the big picture; what my year would look like, and look into how much my workload would be impacted by that and how they worked together with the other classes instead of just looking at a singular class. It is also teachers, for example which teachers teach which courses, things like that.

Ryan Hinchey
Now you talked about how universities perceive the difficulty of the classes that you are taking. Where did you learn about that first and who has told you about that; has that been reinforced?

Student 1
Yes, I think it has been reinforced by my parents and by my college counsellor.

Ryan Hinchey
When you have talked to university representatives have they stressed the importance of these classes as well?

Student 1
Yes, definitely. I remember talking to a representative from Notre Dame who said, ‘Are you getting all As in all your AP classes?’; it was not even a question of whether or not I was taking APs; it was just assumed that because I was interested in his school I was taking the hardest ones that were available to me.

Ryan Hinchey
Are you aware of the universities’ policies about giving credit for AP classes?

Student 1
Yes, definitely. That also factored into my choice to take AP.

Ryan Hinchey
When you go to BC next year do you know if you are going to be getting any course credit for any of the AP classes that you have taken so far?

Student 1
Yes, for most of my classes I should get some kind of credit, because I was able to make sufficient scores so I can place out of intro and general education classes. I can jump into taking first-year classes.

Ryan Hinchey
That is good. Thinking about the different course offerings available to you, the IB, the AP or just the standard high school curriculum; I know we have talked about this in many different ways, but how did you ultimately come to the conclusion to follow the AP
programme? What was the final decision for you, and looking back at that when was that decision made? Was it made in 10th grade or was it made before that in 8th or 9th grade, and was there a moment that you realised that was the programme that you were going to follow?

**Student 1**

I think it was definitely in 10th grade when I decided that I thought AP was going to be the best choice for me. Having taken AP Euro and seeing what went into taking that class and finding out that I could handle the workload of an AP class...that is where you have mentioned taking an intro to IB class; I feel like that would also have been helpful because I never really had an intro to that, so maybe that would have influenced my decision more, but because I was able to see that I could handle the AP I was more willing to take those classes.

**Ryan Hinchey**

Okay, that is good. You said you had a younger brother; what grade is he in now, 9th or 10th?

**Student 1**

He is in 9th grade, he is a freshman.

**Ryan Hinchey**

If you think about him and some of his friends who are currently in 9th grade, what advice would you give to them about course selection at “SCHOOL XYZ”?

**Student 1**

I would tell them to definitely know what goes into each type of course. I would tell them that the IB is different from the AP in that it has an extended essay, you have to do CAS and you have to do TOK; it has all of these different structures you have to hit in order to complete the course, whereas in AP you just take the classes and figure that out. I would definitely make sure they were aware of all the other constituent things that went into IB as opposed to AP, and definitely just to know their own learning style and to do what is best for them. At our school there is always a dynamic between the AP and the IB students in that the IB students think they do more just because their course requires more outside things such as CAS and NERCS extended essay, whereas they may have never even an AP course; so I’d say don’t listen to all these people, just do what is best for you.

**Ryan Hinchey**

You talk about finding your own learning style and finding information about these classes; do you think the school helps you in that process?

**Student 1**

Yes, the school even provides Futurewise that tells you about your learning style. I have been at “SCHOOL XYZ” for a really long time, and in middle school, lower school and I think
in the early years of high school they provide tests so you know what kind of learner you are. They find it interesting to figure out how kids learn.

**Ryan Hinchey**

Do you think the Futurewise test, the MAP testing and the testing done on Naviance have helped you in figuring out who you are and what type of learner you are, which ultimately helps you make your choices for courses?

**Student 1**

Yes, I think so.

**Ryan Hinchey**

Thinking about the course selection fairs that are available to you and the information sessions that the school holds; did you find those were useful or did you find that all the other influences that we have talked about have been more helpful rather than those structured informational sessions?

**Student 1**

Personally I found that most of the information that I could get from a course selection fair I got from these outside sources, so I have never found the course selection fairs to tell me anything I did not already know about classes. It is definitely helpful for other students so I would never say the course selection fair is a bad idea; but I know for me personally, in talking to other teachers, other students and my elder sibling who has gone through all these classes I already knew most of what they were saying.

**Ryan Hinchey**

Thinking about your high school courses from grades 9-12; now that you're at the end of your high school career, if you were to choose your courses again what would you change, if anything?

**Student 1**

I do not really know if I would change anything. I liked all the courses I took; there was never a class that I took and then thought, 'Oh no, I should not have taken this, it was such a bad idea,' because I feel I learned things from each class I took, and learning is not really a bad thing.

**Ryan Hinchey**

Do you wish there were other courses that were not offered that you could have taken?

**Student 1**

I maybe wanted to try a different language; I have always wanted to take Latin as a course so I would have taken that if it was offered, but it is not.
Ryan Hinchey
Which language did you do instead?

Student 1
I took French up until sophomore year but I stopped taking it for junior and senior year because I did not think I could keep up with the native speakers who were usually taking IB and AP French.

Ryan Hinchey
If there was an option to do French at a non-native speaker level do you think that would have changed your mind about that?

Student 1
Yes, I think so. I enjoyed learning a different language, it was just with testing – I have a pretty strong American accent; it can only get you so far in trying to speak a different language, so usually for orals I could fall short, especially going up against native speakers who have the general speaking down. I fell behind, so I would definitely take a course that was offered for non-native speakers.

Ryan Hinchey
Thinking back to your courses in 9th and 10th grade, do you feel that those adequately prepared you to take the AP programme?

Student 1
Yes. Our school offers courses like science nine, English 10, regular algebra and regular geometry, but there are always advanced classes offered, and I feel that taking those definitely prepared me for AP.

Ryan Hinchey
Is there anything else that we have not covered about courses that you wish was different when looking back at your career, or anything at all that we have not covered today that you think to yourself, ‘I wish I had done this,’ or, ‘I wish I had not done this.’ Any regrets, or are you completely satisfied with everything that happened at “SCHOOL XYZ” in regards to your course selection?

Student 1
Ever since you mentioned an introduction to IB course I feel like that would definitely be something worth establishing at “SCHOOL XYZ”, just so people could prepare themselves or see if that would be a good option for them. I would have taken that and maybe that would have changed which path I went on, even though I am happy I took AP maybe I could have taken a mix of AP and IB classes without taking the full IB. Sometimes I wish I had taken an economics class but I never had a huge interest in it, and there was usually not really a place for it in my schedule so I never ended up taking that. Like we just discussed, I almost
wish I could have continued with my language without the fear of falling behind or having it severely impact my GPA just because I was not as strong in my speaking of it. I would say those were my main regrets if I had any, but overall I was happy with how my classes turned out.

**Ryan Hincheney**

If you were to think about someone you look up to, admire and role-model yourself on, what do you think that they would say about your course selection at “SCHOOL XYZ”?

**Student 1**

I look up to my mum a lot because she is a big presence in my life. I would say she would be pretty proud with how well I have done in courses and being able to keep up with my work while also having time for my friends, my sports and activities outside of school; so I think she would be pretty satisfied with how I have been able to stay responsible and organised with my work.

**Ryan Hincheney**

Do you have any questions for me at this time?

**Student 1**

I do not think so.

**Ryan Hincheney**

I am going to stop recording now.

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**Interview 2**

Interviewer: Ryan Hincheney  
Student: “Student 2”

**Ryan Hincheney:** Hello, Student 2.

**Student 2:** Hello.

**Ryan Hincheney:** Could you just please state your name for the record?

**Student 2:** “Student 2.”
Ryan Hinchey: You’re currently a senior at “SCHOOL XYZ”?

Student 2: Yes.

Ryan Hinchey: Could you please state your citizenship, please?

Student 2: American citizen.

Ryan Hinchey: How many years have you been at “SCHOOL XYZ”?

Student 2: Four.

Ryan Hinchey: Before that, you were in the US?

Student 2: Yes.

Ryan Hinchey: Great. Just to make you aware once again that this is for my doctoral dissertation at Northeastern, and the topic of the presentation is Student’s Course Choices and How They Make Sense of Selecting Their Courses at “SCHOOL XYZ”. Today, we’re just going to go over a few things. I had previously had you complete the Mind Map, and we’ll start talking about that. Then we can go on to some more questions that I have for you. Just to let you know, this session is being recorded. You will have access to both the transcription and the recording afterwards if you want them. It will be stored for a period of time afterwards and then destroyed. All names and everything else will be kept confidential, so there is nothing that you need to worry about. Your name will not be tied to anything. Nobody will see it, except for me and my advisor. Hopefully, you should feel free to say anything you want. This is no reflection on you as a student at “SCHOOL XYZ”, but just purely for the purposes of this dissertation. Do you have any questions at this time?

Student 2: No, I don’t.

Ryan Hinchey: Just to let you know, you can stop if you feel uncomfortable at any time. If there’s any questions that you have during this, let me know and I’ll proceed accordingly. If you do not have any questions, then we’ll move right into the Mind Map. Do you have your copy of the Mind Map in front of you?

Student 2: Yes.

Ryan Hinchey: Looking at the Mind Map with your name in the middle and the template that was provided, you have filled out the circles of influence around your name, so I’d like to talk to you a little bit about each of
these. Is there one from the list that you have done? Is there one that you would like to start talking about?

Student 2: I think what encouraged me most was probably psychology. Maybe you should talk about that first.

Ryan Hinchey: Great. Why would you say that your psychology class/teacher at school has inspired you the most in terms of your course selection?

Student 2: I found the material in the psychology class I found very interesting, and I thought that it would be applicable to what I wanted to do when I get to college, which is sociology. However, “SCHOOL XYZ” doesn’t offer that, but I was still intrigued with the coursework and the material, and Miss Windish, the teacher, made it very interesting.

Ryan Hinchey: Just to be clear, you are taking the AP psychology course?

Student 2: Yes.

Ryan Hinchey: Is there anything specific that Miss Windish has done or specific content that she’s covered that has made it more interesting to you?

Student 2: I think the specific content that was covered was the abnormal psychology or the treatment of psychological disorders. I found that very interesting. Perhaps that’s something that could be put to use in my behavioural psychology that I like to focus on.

Ryan Hinchey: Cool. You took psychology in what year? Was it grade 12?

Student 2: Grade 12, yes.

Ryan Hinchey: Is there a reason that you decided to take it in grade 12 and not in grade 11?

Student 2: I don’t think I knew “SCHOOL XYZ” offered it when it was signing up in grade 11. Then throughout the year, I heard people talking about it, and I was interested that “SCHOOL XYZ” offered it, so I decided to take it my senior year.

Ryan Hinchey: Is it fair to say that ... I guess, thinking about it, if you had known that it had existed before, would you had considered taking possibly IB psychology or did you always know that you wanted to just study the AP psychology direction?
Student 2: I’ve always wanted to go the entirety of the AP route just because I never thought I had the motivation to do the whole IB, so I was very much happy with doing just AP and especially AP psychology.

Ryan Hinchey: How many AP courses have you taken then over the course of your time at “SCHOOL XYZ”?

Student 2: I would have taken eight AP exams over the past two years.

Ryan Hinchey: Psychology being one of your favourite then?

Student 2: Yes.

Ryan Hinchey: Is there anything else that stands out for you in the class or maybe your other AP classes that have led you to take AP psychology in your senior year?

Student 2: I think one of my other classes that led me to take psychology was AP seminar because in one of my group research papers that I did, we were talking about how the technological age now inhibits young children. We were looking at how children performed mentally before the introduction of technology and after, so that influenced me to take it so I could get a further understanding about how minds work.

Ryan Hinchey: Very cool. Moving on to the next level, if it’s okay with you, can we just go clockwise through it?

Student 2: That’s fine.

Ryan Hinchey: For the next level, it looks like you put your geography class, and seniors last year told you that to take it because it’s an easy A.

Student 2: [True 00:06:35].

Ryan Hinchey: Did you believe them? Has it come true? Was it an easy class?

Student 2: I thought it was a relatively easy course. There were a couple units within the course that I thought were difficult, but I don’t think the overall course as a whole is up to the AP standards as some other classes are, but I definitely found it interesting, and it was helpful that the seniors last year that it’s an easy grade booster if you’re willing to put the time in for it because people were saying it’s not as difficult as other APs.

Ryan Hinchey: Sure. Why is it important for you to get an A then?
Student 2: To boost my GPA, especially because the first semester of senior year, colleges were still wanting to see my grades, and having that easy A for an AP class really rounded up my GPA, which made me seem more ... It made me seem more desirable to colleges.

Ryan Hinchey: When you were choosing your classes then, have you always been keeping going to a university in mind as you’re choosing your courses?

Student 2: I never kept a specific university in mind, but because I pretty much only applied to Texas, I knew what, in general, Texas colleges were wanting, so I’ve tried just to keep in that general area.

Ryan Hinchey: Now that you’re about to graduate, what are your plans for after graduation? Are you going to university after graduation?

Student 2: Yes.

Ryan Hinchey: Where are you going?

Student 2: Texas A&M University with my first year being at the Corpus Christi campus.

Ryan Hinchey: Great. What do you hope to study when you’re there?

Student 2: Sociology and a minor in criminology.

Ryan Hinchey: Great. Then moving on to the next level, you said that you took two math classes because you were afraid that you weren’t going to graduate. Can you explain that?

Student 2: I’m very bad at math, especially when it came to “SCHOOL XYZ”. Really, all they promote were STEM classes, and you’re looked down on if you weren’t very good at those. I was afraid at one point that I didn’t have enough math credits to graduate because they changed it or I figured out halfway through my junior year that I actually didn't have enough to graduate, so I became very panicked and scared and signed up to take two math classes with the hope of passing at least one of them to get my other half credit I needed to graduate, which I ended up getting.

Ryan Hinchey: Were there any other classes that you took because you knew that they were graduation requirements at “SCHOOL XYZ” or was it just the math class?
Student 2: It was also English just because you have to have the four years of English, but I was never worried about it like I was with my math classes.

Ryan Hinchey: You were happy taking English each year, but if you didn’t have to take a math class each year, you would have been happy, as well?

Student 2: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: Do you know if “SCHOOL XYZ” has any other requirements or is it just pretty much the English and math that you were made aware of?

Student 2: I know the amount of credits I need [inaudible 00:10:24] math and science credits, so I took more sciences in the hopes of fulfilling those credits while doing the bare minimum for math. Then I also knew about the number of social science classes you needed and English and electives.

Ryan Hinchey: Did you feel that what you were planning to take already fulfilled most of the graduation requirements at “SCHOOL XYZ”, except for the math?

Student 2: Yes, definitely.

Ryan Hinchey: Going back to the university and how they are viewing the grades that you’re getting, do you think that they took into considerations the classes that you took, as well?

Student 2: I think they did because I came from a public school in Texas before I moved here, and I know they definitely don't promote the higher level classes as much as they do here, so I definitely felt colleges were looking more at my profile, obviously coming from an international school overseas and seeing that I took primarily higher level classes. I feel like they looked at my applications a bit more.

Ryan Hinchey: Good. Moving on to the next level, you talk about the TV show, Criminal Minds. Do you want to talk about how that has influenced you and maybe what the show is about a little bit?

Student 2: I put Criminal Minds on here because that show’s really what influenced me to even think about studying sociology and criminology at university because I became so infatuated with it, and I became extremely interested, and that also is what led me to take psychology at school so that I could get a head start in college for those classes. Go ahead.
Ryan Hinchey: In the show, what sort of a connection ... I’m assuming it’s a crime show.

Student 2: The show’s about a specific unit called the Behavioural Analysis Unit at the FBI, which is where they take sociology and psychology and behavioural psychology and they determine when a criminal, who the criminal is, who committed the crime without any evidence. It’s purely based on how they’re thinking and their past actions and predicting what they’ll do next.

Ryan Hinchey: Was that the first time that you made the connection of something that you saw that you could possibly study then later on? That was the impetus for saying, "I could actually do this at the university level." I’m just trying to think how to-

Student 2: When I-

Ryan Hinchey: Go ahead. Sorry.

Student 2: When I was yo-, I watched a lot of crime shows because my family really likes to watch them. When I was younger, I always thought it’d be really cool to be a forensic scientist, but I’m not the best in the math and science department, so I never actually thought I’d be able to do it, but then, obviously, when I got older and I was watching Criminal Minds and I was understanding how they were doing things, especially in certain units in my psychology course, I was like, "This is what they do on the show. I’m learning this now. I would be able to do this at the university level and potentially get a job out of this."

I talked about it a lot when I was younger, wanting to work with government and things like that, crime units, and I drifted away from it for a while and went towards music and education. Then I ended up doing a 180 again and just coming back and doing criminal justice.

Ryan Hinchey: You said you actually watched some of these shows with your family. Did you talk to them about this decision at all?

Student 2: I did because, like I said before, I used to want to be going down the music and education route because I do play the cello, and I was very involved in music since the 6th grade, so my parents were very encouraging of wanting me to do music, but I came to the realisation of I’m more likely to get a job out of doing psychology or sociology degree or getting a criminal justice degree and working for the government than I would per se a music degree.
Ryan Hinchey: Cool. Then in the next level, you talk about how you would like to become a trained professional in the behavioural analysis unit with the FBI. You have a fairly specific goal in mind for after you graduate college?

Student 2: Yes, because when I was watching Criminal Minds, I didn't actually think that was a unit that existed in the FBI, but when I started getting college acceptances and come to the decision of wanting to change my major to criminology, I found that that actually is a real thing within the FBI. One of the schools that I got into, Sam Houston State, they are very much known for their criminal justice programme as they're in the campuses where the state penitentiary is. It's very involved in government and criminal justice. I saw that they had a programme and internship at the FBI. I became very interested again and I started doing even more research trying to figure out what do I need to do in order to get this internship, so I became even more involved in trying to figure out how to get either an FBI job or just a job within the government.

Ryan Hinchey: You know of other career possibilities that are not in the FBI, but something that you would be happy with?

Student 2: Yes.

Ryan Hinchey: In that same field of behavioural analysis?

Student 2: Yes, because the FBI is extremely picky about who they hire, and I'm not sure if I want to live out of state quite just yet. There are many things, like become a State Trooper or work within the Texas-based FBI headquarters, and see what happens there and possibly transfer, but this is always what I have been wanting to do for almost a year now is work with the FBI.

Ryan Hinchey: When you were thinking back at your course selection early on in your high school career then, your career prospects never really played a big role in that because you were slightly undecided at that time, correct?

Student 2: Yes.

Ryan Hinchey: As you progressed through your high school career, is it fair to say that your interests were shaped by things like TV shows and your teachers and then you've become more structured and more focused in on courses that you want to take that will lead you to that career eventually?
Student 2: Definitely, yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: Your final bubble, you talked about your literature teacher, Mr. Miller, who encouraged you ... It says, "Encouraged you to ..."

Student 2: I just d- ...

Ryan Hinchey: Sorry, I can't read that.

Student 2: Because Mr. Miller wasn't my literature teacher, but he was my AP language teacher, and he very much encouraged our entire class to take AP lit. That's what I meant to write there. Encouraged me to take the class. Also, just because I'm also very interested in literature, so I felt the class is very interesting. It's a small class, so I thought it was very inclusive and an intimate class setting where we were able to have free open discussions about whatever we were reading. Everyone had differing opinions that allowed us to shape our own, maybe even change some of our own opinions.

Ryan Hinchey: When you were choosing your courses, were you aware of who would be teaching your classes or how many students would be in the classes?

Student 2: I knew who would be teaching my AP English language class because everyone talked about Mr. Miller, but we all thought that Mr. Miller was also going to be teaching AP lit because he did teach it last year. I didn't know until the first day of school that Mr. Blendheim was, in fact, teaching it.

Ryan Hinchey: Did that actually impact your decision when you were signing up for it, the fact that Mr. Miller was planning on teaching the AP lit class?

Student 2: It definitely helped because Mr. Miller's one of my favourite teachers from high school. I thought he was one of my most influential teachers. He genuinely made me a better writer and a better researcher and how to write papers and do research and how to think about things, and I even asked him to write my college recommendation letters.

Ryan Hinchey: Good. Do you see some of the things that you learned, the subjects that you learned, the research methods that you learned in your literature class, did you see that translate to any of your other classes, like your psychology class, or can you see you using those skills that you've learned in the future?
Student 2: For my English classes, I didn't necessarily use them much in other classes because there wasn't as much essay writing in classes like psychology and geography, but definitely in my AP research class. I felt that I was better prepared to writing this essay, having gone through those courses and having to do a literature review at the beginning of my research essay. I was definitely using ... Taking AP lit helped me write that.

Ryan Hinchey: Do you think the school prepares you in terms of the content that you’re going to be studying in the classes, or do you take them primarily just because you know that you need to be taking an English class, so you've decided to take the AP class? How well informed are you of content that will be taught in the class before you actually take the class?

Student 2: I don’t think “SCHOOL XYZ” does a very good job of informing what the class is about because when we all signed up to take AP lang, we just figured it was the first year of English. We thought we were going to be reading books like we’ve done in every other English class in high school because that's what you did in grade nine and grade 10, when, in fact, it was more analysing essays and figuring out how people talked and what these different things mean. I don’t think any of us really had any clue what we were getting into for lang.

Ryan Hinchey: Do you think if you were provided better information during the course selection process that any of your courses that you've chosen would have been different?

Student 2: Personally, I don’t think knowing what was happening in the course would have changed my thought of taking it because I was always wanting to take the AP route, so I was always going to do AP English. It was more of being blindsided with all that's going on, but I don’t think it would have changed my decision personally.

Ryan Hinchey: Thinking about the different course offerings available to you, the IB, the AP, or just the American high school curriculum, why did you come to the conclusion to follow the AP programme? You talked about not having the motivation to study the IB programme, but were there other factors in that decision? How did you find out about the IB programme? How did you say, "This is the programme for me," versus other programmes?

Student 2: I chose the AP programme because I’d already heard about it when I was in Texas, so I was already familiar with it. I didn't know what the IB was when I came to “SCHOOL XYZ” and I was learning about it. I just thought that it was way too much work for me over the course of
two years, and I didn’t really have the mentality to do that, even
though when I look back on it now, the AP programme requires just
the same amount of work in a shorter time span. Then with colleges
and whatnot, all the colleges I were applying to in Texas, they don’t
really, aside from maybe two, like the University of Texas, they don’t
really care about the IB because it’s not really something that’s been
introduced in many schools in the state yet, so not many people know
about it, so they definitely promoted AP more because that’s what the
majority ... Those were the typical higher level classes people were
taking.

Ryan Hinchey: Sure. Do you have any older siblings who have gone through either of
those programmes, IB or the AP?

Student 2: I do have an older sibling, but he did not go through those
programmes.

Ryan Hinchey: Did he contribute to any of your decision making process? Did you use
him as seeking any advice when it came to the selection process, or
did you think you had enough resources to make your decision on
your own?

Student 2: No, I did not ask my brother. I came to the decision on my own,
figured out what I wanted to do.

Ryan Hinchey: Think about a time that you had to sit down and choose your courses,
and presumably, you’re limited by the number of periods in a day of
how many courses that you can actually take. Was there a time that
you had to choose between two courses that you wanted to take?

Student 2: I don’t think I’ve necessarily had that problem because I do take less
classes because I think I only took six classes this year, so I still had I
think one or two open spaces left on my schedule, but I did start self
studying [AA 00:26:04] programme, which I think that racked up my
AP classes to taking five this past school year, and I think “SCHOOL
XYZ” definitely would have tried to have stopped me from taking
more than four, but I don’t I’ve ever had to choose between classes to
take.

Ryan Hinchey: Do you think that the AP programme provides a bit more flexibility in
terms of what courses you can take then? Is that what you’re saying?

Student 2: Can you say that again?

Ryan Hinchey: Does the AP programme provide more flexibility in your opinion to
take the courses that you want to take?
Student 2: Yes, definitely.

Ryan Hinchey: Think about a student who's in grade eight, grade nine, grade ten. If you were to advise them on their course selection, what advice do you think you would give to them?

Student 2: I think it more depends on ... I think I'd ask them first where they wanted to go to university because I feel like at “SCHOOL XYZ”, that plays a huge role in the classes you take because most people that end up going to the US do the AP programme because that's just more nationally recognised in the United [inaudible 00:27:23], whereas if you were to go to the UK or to Europe for university, they look much more at the IB because it's much more promoted there. I feel like if they were to ask me for advice, I'd ask them where they're wanting to go college first before I gave them anymore.

Ryan Hinchey: That's good. Is there anything else that you'd talk to them about with classes or you think it's keeping the end sight in mind was the biggest determining factor for you?

Student 2: I had a couple sophomores, grade ten, ask me whether the AP Capstone programme, which is seminar and research, whether it was a good programme to take and whether I thought it was beneficial or not, and I always told them if you can handle a large amount of work in a short period of time with lots of essay writing, with lots of essays to write, both individually and as a group, with extreme criticism being taken into place with those essays, then I say, "Go for it. Like, it's really going to help you, but if you don't take criticism well or you're not, um, up for writing, like, 20+ essays, like, a month for a class," then I told them, "It probably wouldn't be the best for you."

Ryan Hinchey: If you had received that advice before, would you have taken the class still, or would you have not?

Student 2: I'm not too sure because I've only heard primarily positive things about the AP Capstone programme, especially when it came to seminar because when I originally signed up to take AP lang, they said on the “SCHOOL XYZ” portal that if you're taking AP lang, you have to take seminar. It was a done deal. You had to take both of them, which actually wasn't the case. They were just trying to get more people to sign up for the class, so I signed up for it because I thought I had to for taking English. Even though some people dropped it that first week because they found out they didn't actually have to take it, I still thought, "Why not just take the class and see what happens?"
Ryan Hinchey: Thinking back, now that you’re about to graduate, thinking back throughout your high school courses, would you change anything, starting back from as early as grade nine? Is there any courses that you would take again, that you wouldn’t take again, that you wish were offered, but just weren’t offered?

Student 2: I could easily go back to grade nine and probably just tell myself just to try a bit harder in math and either take a lower level math class and just work my way up gradually because I didn’t take a math class my junior year of high school, so I feel like I probably should have just taken a math class and gotten it over with. That way, I wouldn’t have to burden myself senior year. I talked about this in my AP research essay because I did [IBDP 00:30:47] music for a year and a half, and I found it to be, because when I was wanting to do music and education in college, because IB music was the only higher level music course that “SCHOOL XYZ” offered so I felt obligated to take it for the degree that I wanted, and I found it to be extremely stressful. If I had to go back and change my mind, I wouldn’t have taken the class in the first place.

Ryan Hinchey: Do you think you would have taken another class in its place in music that maybe wasn’t as at a higher level?

Student 2: If “SCHOOL XYZ” had offered, because there’s a AP music theory course, and if “SCHOOL XYZ” had offered that, I very much would have preferred to have taken that. I would have preferred to have taken the one-year course of music theory than the two-year course.

Ryan Hinchey: Earlier, you mentioned that “SCHOOL XYZ” doesn’t have a psychology class. Sorry, a sociology class. If “SCHOOL XYZ” did, would you have taken that, as well?

Student 2: Most definitely, yeah, because I either over the summer, I very much came to the conclusion of wanting to scratch music and doing the sociology and criminol-

Ryan Hinchey: Hello? Sydney, I think I lost you.

Student 2: Can you repeat that last bit? I think the connexion lost.

Ryan Hinchey: Yeah, sorry. Just saying about the sociology, if you would have taken that if “SCHOOL XYZ” had offered it, and you said yes, that you would have taken sociology if they did. In general, do you feel that “SCHOOL XYZ” offers ample amount of classes? For the student population, do you think it’s enough or do you think it’s too many? Do you think it’s too little or just about right?
Student 2: I’ve been thinking about this, and it comes from which diploma you’re doing, as well, because they definitely don’t offer as many AP courses because less people take the AP, and then also “SCHOOL XYZ” really much does promote STEM than they do English or any other classes, so all of the classes are geared towards science and math. Then, also, coming from public school in the states, I feel states offer many more classes that could be beneficial to someone, such as an anatomy class or home economics because I took home economics when I was in middle school, and I learned how to balance chequebooks and how to do every day to day things, which I don’t think you can even learn at “SCHOOL XYZ”.

Ryan Hinchey: Those are all the questions that I have for you right now. Do you have any questions for me or anything about this project or anything about course selection, in general?

Student 2: No, I don’t think so.

Ryan Hinchey: You feel that you’ve managed to say everything that you wanted to about your course selection while you were a student at “SCHOOL XYZ”?

Student 2: Yes.

Ryan Hinchey: I’m going to end the recording, so thank you for your participation.

Interview 3

Interviewer: Ryan Hinchey
Student: “Student 3”

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Hi Student 3. For the record, can you please state your name?

Student 3: My name’s ‘Student 3’.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. And you’re currently a senior at “SCHOOL XYZ”?

Student 3: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Could you please state your citizenship?

Student 3: I’m a British citizen.
Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Just to make you once aware of what’s going on. This recording is for my doctoral dissertation and Northeaster and the topic of the presentation is student’s course choices and how they make sense of their selecting courses at “SCHOOL XYZ”. Today we’re just going to go over a few things. I previously had you do the mind map so we’ll start talking about that and then we can go on from there to some more questions that I have for you. Just a reminder that this session is being recorded. You’ll have access to both the transcription and the recording afterwards if you want them. However, they will be a stored for a period of time afterwards and then destroyed. All names and everything else, all the other data, will be kept confidential so there’s nothing you need to worry about. Your name will not be tied to anything. Nobody will see it except for me and my advisor so hopefully you should feel free to say anything you want. This is no reflection on you as a student or “SCHOOL XYZ”, but just purely for the purposes of this dissertation.

Student 3: Okay.

Ryan Hinchey: Any questions so far?

Student 3: No, I have no questions.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. I just want to let you know that you can stop if you feel uncomfortable at any time. If there are questions that you have during this, just let me know and we’ll proceed accordingly. If you don’t have any questions, then we’ll move right into the mind map. Do you have your copy with you, in front of you?

Student 3: No, I can get it up now if you give me one second.

Ryan Hinchey: Yep.

Student 3: Okay.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay.

Student 3: Yeah, I’ve got it.

Ryan Hinchey: On your mind map you’ve written your name in the middle and then in the circles around your name you’ve written factors that have influenced your course selection while you’re at “SCHOOL XYZ”.

Student 3: Yeah.
Ryan Hinchey: Before we start, can you tell me whether or not you’re an IB student, an AP student? What curriculum are you following right now?

Student 3: I’ve just finished the IB diploma.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay, so you’re a full-diploma candidate.

Student 3: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: What were your three higher level subjects and three standard level subject?

Student 3: I did higher maths, physics and chemistry and standard English lang lit, French and economics.

Ryan Hinchey: Wow. That’s a full load.

Student 3: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: How long have you been at “SCHOOL XYZ”?

Student 3: I’ve been at “SCHOOL XYZ” since I was in second grade so a bit over 10 years now.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Before doing the diploma programme, did you do the MYP programme?

Student 3: Yeah. I did the MYP and the PYP before that.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay, fantastic. This is primarily focused upon your high school, so grades nine through twelve, that MYP and DP programme.

Student 3: Okay.

Ryan Hinchey: Thinking about why you’ve made those choices. Thinking about those programmes, we’ll revert to your mind map now. Of the, it looks like, seven circles around your name, is there any one that you’d like to start talking about? We will discuss all of them, but is there one that you’d like to start with?

Student 3: I’d say teachers are probably a good place to start, the maths, physics and chemistry teachers.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay, so let’s start at the top and then, if it’s okay with you, we’ll just go clockwise from there?
Student 3: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: Tell me about your teachers, your math, your physics, your chemistry teachers and what impact that they’ve had on you and choosing your courses at “SCHOOL XYZ”.

Student 3: From basically the beginning of middle school I’ve had a really good selection of maths and science teachers. I’ve had quite a few teachers throughout the years for these subjects but every single one of them has really encouraged me to develop in those areas. They’ve made it really easy for me to progress and very easy for me to learn how I want to learn, and that’s made me enjoy the subject more. I think that’s influenced my decision to pursue those areas as my higher levels.

Ryan Hinchey: Do you remember having any specific conversations with them, those teachers, about your course selection?

Student 3: Yeah, my maths teachers always encouraged me to either do a maths or a science degree of some form. All of them were either pure mathematicians or physicists. I think the way they taught maths showed that they taught it through, and that they had learned it through, more practical uses rather than just as a pure subject.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay, that’s good. Now, is it fair to assume that your interests lie within maths, physics and chemistry then?

Student 3: Yeah. Yeah, definitely.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. When you were choosing your higher level subjects, were those three your natural selections or did you consider doing any of the other three standard level subjects as higher subjects?

Student 3: Well, I was pretty sure about physics and chemistry, but maths I’ve always heard was a really difficult subject to do at higher level in diploma so I was a bit cautious about choosing that one to begin with, but after conversations with my maths teachers they told me that at the level that I was in ninth and tenth grades then I shouldn’t really struggle too much with higher level maths. Physics was definitely an easy choice for me. It’s my favourite subject and it’s what I want to do later in life. Chemistry I think just it suited my ability in sciences and maths much more than any of my other standard courses. I think I’m much better at working out problems than I am at doing long written responses. I think that’s a big factor in the courses that I chose.
Ryan Hinchey: Now, thinking about back a few years when you were finishing the MYP programme in grade ten, was there ever any consideration about changing to a different curriculum, say the AP programme or even moving into a British school system?

Student 3: Well, I had a couple friends who did that but I’ve been at “SCHOOL XYZ” for so long and my brother had just finished his IB diploma. I think it was just the right choice for me to keep going rather than to try and change up my whole life to choose a different course.

Ryan Hinchey: Sure.

Student 3: I think it just made sense for the continuity of everything to stay with the IB diploma and stay at “SCHOOL XYZ”.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Moving on to your next circle. You talk about university open days and course lectures.

Student 3: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: How did that impact your course selection?

Student 3: Well, when you go to these open days and to the lectures about courses it gives you an indication of what the course is going to be like and whether or not it’s the right subject for you to do at university. In every single one of them they make a point of saying what you need to have at a high school level to be able to get on to the course. For all the courses that I wanted to do that were engineering courses, they all specified that I needed to do higher level maths and higher level physics. Considering that I pretty much knew what I wanted to do after the IB, and I knew what I had to do to get there, made my course selection a lot easier I think.

Ryan Hinchey: Sure. What is it that you are going to do after you graduate? Are you going directly on to university?

Student 3: Yeah, directly to university. I’m staying in the UK to do mechanical engineering.

Ryan Hinchey: Great. At what university will you be studying?

Student 3: If my results are good enough I will go to Imperial College London.

Ryan Hinchey: Fantastic. Okay, moving on to your next one. You had mentioned earlier that you did have an older brother. Do you have any other siblings or is it just your older brother?
Student 3: I’ve got an older brother who finished the IB three years ago and I’ve got a younger sister who’s two years younger than me so she’s starting the IB in September.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. How did your older siblings and friends who are currently at university factor in on your decision making? What did they tell you or what did you see from them?

Student 3: I think my brother chose very different courses to me for his diploma and I think it turned me off a few courses. He took history at higher level and that then consumed all of his time and I realised that that’s not something that I wanted to deal with. That was a factor in me choosing economics over history, because I do have more of a casual interest in history, but seeing the demand of the course and how that would impact the other courses that I was doing and my ability to do well in those courses when I’m having to dedicate time to other subjects, I think that was a big factor in the standard level courses that I chose. He also did standard French like I did and I think that made it an easier decision to choose to keep doing standard French because I knew what was required for the course and the sort of impact that it would have in my life over the next two years.

Ryan Hinchey: What did he go on to study at university, your brother?

Student 3: He’s just finished doing a Bachelor’s degree in history at UCL.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. It sounds like his higher level choices were much more applicable to what he wanted to study as well, sort of along the same lines as your higher levels.

Student 3: Yeah, yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: That’s good.

Student 3: But I think he decided to study history after he had studied history IB.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay.

Student 3: It was the other way around for him. His IB choices dictated his degree rather than mine being my degree dictating my IB choices.

Ryan Hinchey: Sure. Do you know of anyone who has looked back, along the same line of your brother, who has been shut out from studying certain things that they wanted at university because of their course selection at high school?
Student 3: Yeah, there’s a few people I know who have had to restart the IB, as in they’ve got a year into their IB and they decided that they wanted to do medicine and that meant that they had to take chemistry and biology, and therefore they had to start again. They’re now in the year below. There’s also someone I know who he was doing A levels and I think he wasn’t taking one of the courses he needed to so what he did was he then took a year out and did catch-up courses to bring him back up to speeds, to where he needed to be to apply for university.

Ryan Hinchey: Sure. Those people who are doing medicine in the IB, did they complete grade 11 at “SCHOOL XYZ”?

Student 3: Yeah, they’ve been here for three years I think. They completed grade 11 without doing higher chemistry and then they have retaken grade 11 with higher chemistry.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Interesting. Is it fair to assume that they learned of the university entrance requirements too late then to change the first time they did 11?

Student 3: I think it was not necessarily that they learned about the university requirements, it’s that they decided that medicine was the path that they wanted to follow too late.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay.

Student 3: They had decided on their IB courses thinking that they were going to do some other scientific degree but then changed their minds to doing medicine.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay.

Student 3: Then had to change.

Ryan Hinchey: That makes sense. Keeping along that same line of thought. With the university prospectuses, which is your next circle on your mind map.

Student 3: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: When did you start receiving these university prospectuses or when did you start taking notice of them and how they impacted your high school course selection?

Student 3: I think it was in grade 10 that I started going to the open days and university fairs. There was universities visiting the school and so for every one I visited I tried to grab a prospectus because it just made
comparing them a lot easier. Also then, it gives you the requirements for the course and it's just really a very simple way of seeing what you need to take and what then allows you to take at the IB to get into that university course.

**Ryan Hinchey:** Did you always know that you wanted to attend university in the UK?

**Student 3:** Well, I think I’ve always wanted to stay in Europe. Going to the US for university wasn’t really an option for me. But in the last couple years I’ve decided that the UK is just where I’m comfortable and that’ll allow me to concentrate on my degree more than concentrating on trying to survive in a foreign country.

**Ryan Hinchey:** Sure. When you were looking at other European universities, did you look at their entrance requirements as well?

**Student 3:** No, because I think I had ruled them out before I was seriously considering different courses and before I knew what sort of level I’d be at in terms of my IB score.

**Ryan Hinchey:** Okay. When were you made aware of your IB score, your [inaudible 00:17:24] score?

**Student 3:** I think it was half way through 11th grade that we got our semester one report cards. That was a pretty good indication of how I was doing in each of my subjects. It’s stayed reasonably similar since then.

**Ryan Hinchey:** Okay, so you felt like your university decisions about where to apply have been based upon pretty sound predictions within the IB programme?

**Student 3:** Yeah, I’d say so. The UCAS system means that you can take a range of different universities, different levels of entry requirements. Even if your predicted grade goes up or down by a fair bit, then you’ll still be within a range of universities that you’ve applied to.

**Ryan Hinchey:** Sure. You’ve accepted a position at Imperial for your firm offer, have you accepted a conditional offer as well?

**Student 3:** My Imperial offer is conditional.

**Ryan Hinchey:** Sorry, yeah.

**Student 3:** My insurance choice …

**Ryan Hinchey:** That’s your insurance offer.
Student 3: Yeah, so I've got University of Bristol as my insurance option.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay, great. Great, so moving on to the next. Your parents, explain to me how your parents have helped in this process. You've described it as a two-way relationship with your parents, so talk about that a little bit.

Student 3: Well, I think my parents have always been very accepting of whatever I choose to do at university and high school. There wasn't too much pressure from them to go a certain direction. I think that made it easier for me to decide what I wanted to do rather than having to worry about whether they were going to be happy with it or not. My dad has always encouraged me to do whatever makes me happy and to choose something that I enjoy doing. My mom’s background is in mathematics so that was also a factor growing up with two parents that are chartered accountants and who have a pretty good background with numbers and working with maths. It made it a lot easier growing up knowing that that was what I was interested in.

Ryan Hinchey: Sure, you've got a built-in math tutor.

Student 3: Yeah, yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: Do you remember at any time disagreeing with your parents in terms of selection of courses?

Student 3: Well, I don't think I disagreed with my parents very much because I've always known what it was that I wanted to do, but my sister doing her course selections now, she's not as certain of what she wants to do in future so it's much harder for my parents and my brother and myself to help her make her choices. Now there's two of us who have been through the IB and we have a pretty good knowledge of what each course demands. Trying to help her to make an informed decision about what she chooses to do without knowing what she wants to do after the IB, I think that's causing a few more problems and a bit of discussion.

Ryan Hinchey: Sure. Great, so moving on, your next circle talks about your interest in racing and cars.

Student 3: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: First, tell me when that interest came about. Has it been something that you've been interested in for a long time?
Student 3: Yeah, it’s just one of those childhood interests that I’ve stuck with. It was I think 12 or 13 years ago now I went to a Grand Prix with my dad and since then I’ve just been quite interested in the cars and just everything surrounding it, all the engineering that goes into it. I think that’s something that guided me to choose mechanical engineering over other types of engineering. I think without that interest in cars and to racing I would’ve been much more inclined to do something more chemistry related and focus more on chemistry, probably not take physics at higher level. But I think those interests have guided me along the more physics-y root.

Ryan Hinchey: When you were looking at universities, did you look at universities that had a component within racing and cars or had a specialty in racing and cars? Did that influence your decision with your university placement at all?

Student 3: Yeah, so most of the top universities in the UK for engineering, they take part in something called Formula Student, which is a student-run competition between the universities, throughout Europe I think, where the students design and built these racing cars. That’s something that they pretty much all brought up on their open days. It’s something that they’re very proud of and something they like to show off. Yeah, it is something. There’s a couple universities that I went, when there was a split decision between two universities, I’d go for the one that was more focused on cars and that sort of engineering rather than other types.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay, great. Is the hope to continue with that after you graduate from Imperial? To continue within cars and racing, is that the possible career path you see yourself on?

Student 3: It’s definitely a possibility. It’s definitely something that I’d like to keep it up as a hobby and, I don’t know, I’ll have four years or so to consolidate that interest and decide whether it’s something that I’d like to take on as a career or whether it’s something that I’d prefer to have simply as casual interest.

Ryan Hinchey: Do you remember when you first made the connection that you can study mechanical engineering, cars, racing at the university level? Do you remember how that [inaudible 00:25:52] came about?

Student 3: Not really. I don’t think it was such a sudden thing. It was really just getting closer and closer to high school and seeing my brother come through the IB. That’s when I really got interested in the sort of things that I could do at university and what I’d have to decide to take.
Ryan Hinchey: Your maths, your physics and you chemistry teachers, do they touch upon cars and racing at all in their classes?

Student 3: Not really. It's not really anything that's relevant to any of the syllabuses, syllabi. But yeah, it's definitely something that I've kept up in my free time rather than at school.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. That leads into the next circle which is your passion for mechanics. How do you keep up with that outside of school? Are there any clubs or organisations that you're part of or is it something that you [inaudible 00:27:11] on your own?

Student 3: No, that's something that I'll do on my own. I'll read books and do research on the internet. It's something that's slightly touched upon in the physics syllabus. I get it from there at school as well, but yeah, it's mostly something that I do on my own time. Yeah, it's more of a hobby.

Ryan Hinchey: When you were choosing your classes you talk about how it's in the physics syllabus. Did you have access to that syllabus when you were making your class decisions or did you see any type of description that you used as part of your course decision making process?

Student 3: Yeah, before I chose all my courses I did look into what was involved in each of them, so the sorts of papers that I'd be writing and the exams that I'd be taking as well as the different topics that we'd cover in class. That's something that teachers were very helpful with as well. They were all very willing to share what the course would be like and the interesting things that we'd get up to during the course.

Ryan Hinchey: Is that something that you yourself had to initiate or was that something that was provided to you by your school?

Student 3: I think it was slightly provided by the school but it wasn't pushed at all. We would have ... I think there's an evening in 10th grade where they go through all the options that you can take in the IB, the courses that you can take and what's involved in each of the courses, but it's quite broad and slightly rushed because they've got to go through all of the courses in one afternoon. It's after those introductory events that it's up to us as students to inquire further with our teachers.

Ryan Hinchey: Do you remember if you ...

Student 3: And they're all very well into it.
Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Do you remember if you went to that event that explained the difference between the courses or did you skip it?

Student 3: Yeah, I did.

Ryan Hinchey: You did attend?

Student 3: No, I attended.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Do you remember if that helped solidify your choices to do the IB programme or do you remember if anything had changed from your attendance in that programme?

Student 3: Well, I think the teachers that did speak about their course, they were all very, very passionate about it and you could tell that they wanted to teach about it. That was really encouraging as a student to know that your teachers care about that course. Yeah, I think it made me more confident with what I had chosen knowing that the teachers would care about it and be excited to teach about it. That makes it easier to learn.

Ryan Hinchey: Definitely. Okay, and then the last circle you talk about is your desire for a hands-on degree. Tell me about that a little bit.

Student 3: I've always been quite a hands-on person. I don't like sitting behind a desk and working for hours on end. It's something that I can't stand and something that I would really hate to have as a future career. I think seeing the things that my brother was doing through his IB it was pretty clear that those subjects that he was taking weren't the subjects for me because they were much more based on long essays and in-depth responses to a single prompt, whereas what I was interested in was solving problems, whether it be physical problems like trying to build stuff or just working things out, that was what I was interested in. Going to university open days, they made it very clear that the engineering courses were definitely very hands-on. They had all the facilities you'd need to design and make all of your ideas. That was just very encouraging knowing that my interests aligned with what I wanted to be able to do in my degree.

Ryan Hinchey: Did you ever feel like, within your choice of doing the IB programme, that some of the classes that you took didn't align to that hands-on learning that you wanted?

Student 3: Definitely. The IB requires that you do a broad range of subjects and they require you to do certain subjects, subject groups, that don't necessarily lie within your interests. For me that was economics and
French. I enjoyed the subject but not in the same way that I enjoyed my higher levels. It was more about the class and having a fun class rather than enjoying the subject itself. The IB, I like the fact that it tries to push you to do a broader range of subjects. I think that's very useful for some people but at the same time, for people who know exactly what they want to do and what they want to get from their high school education and from their university education, it can be a bit limiting because it forces you to divert away from maybe what you know that you want to do in the future.

Ryan Hinchey: Sure. Do you wish you'd had the opportunity to take more classes that were more aligned to what you wanted to do in the science field?

Student 3: I don't think so. I think what I've done is, the courses that I've taken are just right for me. I think it's very close to being too much but at the same time I like the challenge of having six subjects to juggle with and try and do all of them well. I think trying to fit in more of what I like as academic subjects would possibly become a bit more of a burden. I think it's nice to have the opportunity to just pursue them as interests outside of school.

Ryan Hinchey: You referenced your French class that you took.

Student 3: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: As part of the IB programme you have to do a language.

Student 3: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: Can you tell me about when you had to make that decision about doing what language you wanted to do, how did you go about choosing between all of the languages that are on offer? Why did you decide to stay with French instead of choosing a different language that fulfills that requirement of the IB programme?

Student 3: I've been doing French for basically my whole time at school since we moved back to the UK back 10 years ago. My mom speaks pretty good French and none of the rest of my family speaks any of the other languages that we could take in the IB. Yeah, back in lower school we had French lessons and in middle school we had French lessons. There was the option to switch to Spanish at some point but I think having an older brother who spoke French and having my mom who spoke French meant that if I didn't understand something or needed help they'd be much better at helping me in French than they would be helping me in Spanish or any other language that I chose to do.
Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Now, going away from the mind map for a few more questions. You said that you have a younger sister who’s going to be starting the IB programme. If you had to give advice to other students who are younger than you, your sister or even younger who haven’t chosen what they want to do yet, whether that be AP, IB, a British curriculum, what advice would you give to them?

Student 3: I’d say it has to do with how broad they want to be and how much room to explore they want to have in their high school education. The IB definitely gives you much more room to study different subjects, whereas if you know what you want to do and you know what sort of career you want to have and what sort of university degree you want to have I’d recommend looking more into doing AP or more A levels, just because you spend more time on each subject than you do in the IB simply because you have fewer subjects, especially for A levels. Then again, if you don’t know what you want to do, I think the IB’s a really good option because of having six subjects and also having to do your extended essay and TOK and creativity, action and service. It forces you to explore a wide range of ideas and subjects, and that can really help you decide what you want to do later.

Ryan Hinchey: Very good. Final question, if you were to choose your high school courses again, would you change anything?

Student 3: No, I think I’d keep it the same and do the same six subjects again. If getting a high grade in each subject wasn’t required then I’d probably switch out economics for either history or psychology because I find the subjects more interesting, but also at the same time they’re more demanding and so I’d stick with economics for that reason.

Ryan Hinchey: Just as a follow-up, were there courses that you would’ve liked to take at “SCHOOL XYZ” that weren’t offered? Have you heard of other courses out there, other schools, that you see your friends taking and say, "You know what? I wish I could’ve taken that when I was in high school.", but we just didn’t offer it?

Student 3: There are courses that we don’t offer but I think none of them really are my sort of thing. There isn’t a geography class for our 12th grade but it’s not something that I’m interested in. It’s not something that I want to pursue so I’m perfectly fine with the course selection available to us. I know that the school is quite happy to accommodate those who do want to but, no, I’m pretty happy with what I’ve been able to take and the options that I’ve been given.

Ryan Hinchey: Great. Okay Student 3, do you have any questions for me at this time?
Interview 4

Interviewer: Ryan Hinchey
Student: “Student 4”

Ryan Hinchey: Hello Student 4. Just for the record, could you please state your name?
Student 4: I’m Student 4, a senior at “SCHOOL XYZ”.
Ryan Hinchey: Okay. And what’s your citizenship?
Student 4: I’m American.
Ryan Hinchey: Okay and how many years have you been at “SCHOOL XYZ”? 
Student 4: I’ve been at “SCHOOL XYZ” for my last two years, but I also have lived in London for more than that. I’ve lived in London for a combined five years.
Ryan Hinchey: Okay so what school were you at before you were at “SCHOOL XYZ”? 
Student 4: From fifth or seventh grade, I was at ASL. And then I moved back to the US, and then I moved back here between tenth and eleventh grade and went to “SCHOOL XYZ”.
Ryan Hinchey: Okay. And when you moved back to the US, where were you in the US?
Student 4: I’m originally from Chicago area, but I moved to London and I moved back and I was in Greenwich, Connecticut. So New York area, tri-state area.
Ryan Hinchey: That’s great. And what brought back to the UK? Was it a parents’ decision?
Student 4: Yeah, dad’s job.
Ryan Hinchey: Okay fantastic. What does he do?
Student 4: He works for a credit company.
Ryan Hinchey: Very cool. Okay. Just to give you some background knowledge, you are aware that this is for my doctoral dissertation at North Eastern and the topic of the presentation is students' course choices and how they make sense of their selecting courses at "SCHOOL XYZ". Today we're gonna go through a few things. I previously had you do the mind map, and we'll start talking about that and then we'll go on from there to some more questions that I have for you. Just to let you know this session is being recorded. You'll have access to both the transcription and recording afterwards if you want them. It will be stored for a period of time afterwards and then destroyed. All names, all confidential information will be kept confidential so there's nothing you need to worry about. Your name will not be tied to anything, no one will see it except for me and my advisor.

Hopefully you should feel free to say anything you want. And just know that this is not a reflection of you as a student at "SCHOOL XYZ" but purely for the purposes of this dissertation. Do you have any questions so far?

Student 4: No I'm good, we can start with the questions and everything.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay just to let you know, if you do feel uncomfortable at any time, we can stop. If you have questions that you have during the interview, please stop and let me know. We'll proceed accordingly. But if you don't have any questions right now, we'll move right on to the mind map. Do you have a copy of the mind map that you sent to me?

Student 4: Yes, I can pull it up.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay just let me know when you have it ready.

Student 4: I'm good.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay so around the mind map, you were told to put your name in the middle, and then around the mind map in the circles to put things that have influenced your course selection. And with the direction of arrows to indicate the direction of influence of those things around your name. So is there one that you would like to start talking about? Is there one there that strikes your fancy that you want to talk about more than others? We will talk about all of them.

Student 4: Okay. I think one main aspect that sometimes gets overlooked is just the university opinions on classes and the reasoning behind taking the classes is more so just to ... I would admit that some of my classes I took, yes I was interested in them but definitely one thing that helped me decide to take them was the fact that it would look good for
university and my application. Because at this point really, high school, the main thing about it is trying to get into your university that you want to go to and spend the next four years at.

Ryan Hinchey: Sure. So as a senior about to graduate, I assume you have chosen which university you want to attend next year?

Student 4: Yes, I will be attending the University of Chicago.

Ryan Hinchey: Fantastic. Do you know what you hope to study while you're there?

Student 4: I go in undecided, but very likely economics.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay fantastic. And so talking about what courses universities would like to see, have you decided to take AP courses, IB courses? Or have you just done the normal honours level American courses?

Student 4: My schedule is a mix of AP and IB courses. So 'cause when I first moved in, I'll be honest I had no idea what the IB was. And so prior to junior year, I took two APs at my high school in the US, so I was more familiar with that. So I wanted to keep that part going. But with the limit of AP classes at “SCHOOL XYZ”, I had to take a few Ib classes and I think that definitely was beneficial for me. Because in the fact that they're difficult classes, which will help me better for university for when I get there and also they look good for university and how they're going to be looking at my application and et cetera.

Ryan Hinchey: Sure. So when you were in the university process of talking to universities, figuring out if you wanted to apply to them or not, what were they saying about your courses and about your AP and IB courses? Were they receptive?

Student 4: Usually they said, they used their favourite word that it's a holistic approach. That obviously they want you to take the best classes and challenge yourself to whatever your school can offer, but we're gonna look at the entire application. But from what I could tell is that they very much wanted you to, they didn't want just good grades. They wanted to see you challenging yourself, and then also if you're able to get good grades, they then want you to be ... for example at a normal US high school, they don't want you to only be taking honours classes and getting good grades. If there's some AP classes in those same subjects that they would've wanted you to test yourself on and see how well you would've done in those. So I think the mixture of the IB and the AP was beneficial 'cause they see how I was able to do in two different types of style of courses.
Ryan Hinchey: Sure. As you said you took two APs in tenth grade was it before coming to “SCHOOL XYZ”?

Student 4: Yes.

Ryan Hinchey: And so what were those two APs that you took in tenth grade?

Student 4: At my school in Greenwich Connecticut, in tenth grade you were allowed to do AP US history. But if you chose to take AP US history, you also had to take AP English language and composition. So I took both of those ...

Ryan Hinchey: Your school required the English language and composition if you took US history?

Student 4: If you took the US history, yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay.

Student 4: So ideally if I was going to pick it, I probably would have just picked US history. But because I really wanted to take it, I took the AP English as well.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. And then since moving to “SCHOOL XYZ”, what AP classes and what IB classes have you taken?

Student 4: For AP classes, last year I took AP English literature and I took AP statics. And the AP macroeconomics exam, but I was in IB macroeconomics. But then for my IB classes, I was in IB economics higher level, IB aficionado German, IB mathematics higher level, and IB physics higher level for junior year.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. And so for your IB economics class, why did you decide to take the AP economics exam when you were taking the IB economics class?

Student 4: It was more just because for the first year IB economics, most of it is macroeconomics, and I wanted to basically see what I could get on the AP test. And also for some of the universities I was looking at, they didn't necessarily take credit for the IB econ class but they took credit for the AP econ. So I took the AP econ test and self-studied just a little section of it that we didn't fully cover yet in the IB econ class so that I could take the actual exam.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay and when you say the universities take credit, you mean that by taking the AP or IB exam and achieving a certain score that they will
set forth and they will award university level credit for the exams. Correct?

Student 4: Yes. So for example, some of the schools I was looking at, I needed a five on a macro to get either just general elective credit or to test out of an economics class.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. And so when you were looking at your university options, is that something you always looked at? The IB and AP recognition policies at these universities?

Student 4: It was one of, it didn't factor into my set decision of which university was my ranking of the universities. However I did look at it to help decide which courses and which exams I would take at the end of the year because if for example for Chicago, if I saw that I needed to take this exam and I'd learned it but it was the AP version not the IB version, then I wanted to take it so that I could get some course requirements. Because if I already know it, it makes sense to do so.

But it wasn't a deciding factor in my university choices, that one school gave more credit than the other one.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay and do you know if you're getting any credit from Chicago for the courses that you've taken?

Student 4: I'm not getting as much credit as I initially thought because they recently changed their requirements, which was a little annoying because it was right after ... so I applied ED and got in in December. And then in March, they changed their requirements for the two AP English classes. Beforehand you needed a four or a five, and they switched it to a five. And I got fours on both of my AP English exams. So that was slightly annoying. But besides that, I think, Chicago's known as a school that doesn't give much credit 'cause they have the core curriculum and they want them to be teaching you all of these things. But I should be getting some credit for my AP statistics class and my econ.

Ryan Hinchey: Great. Okay and so then other than your university opinions on courses, in one of your circles around your name you talk about your personal desire to take certain classes. So not considering university options, can you talk to me about some examples of courses that you took just out of your own personal interests?

Student 4: The personal interest I would say would probably be, so I'll go through the classes I took this year. So this year, I had all four of the IB classes that I took in junior year, just the second year of it. I took the
second year of higher level literature 'cause of the university opinion, 'cause it would've looked weird if I'd gone from two straight AP Englishes to basic high school English. And I couldn't fit year one into my schedule, so they put me into year two. But I couldn't take the actual final IB exam.

I took AP calculus ...

Ryan Hinchey: Sorry, you couldn't take the exam 'cause you didn't take the two years of it? Is that why?

Student 4: Yeah, I didn't take the first year of the IB literature course. So I wasn't allowed to take the final exam. So I had to ... my teacher gave me a ... yeah. No worries. So then for my APs, I took AP calculus and AP comparative government. So for me, I would say the classes that I was very interested in taking were the AP comparative government class and my economics class, 'cause those are two things that I find very interesting. I like for comparative government, I like learning about the history of the governments, how the governments work, and how you can compare them through different ways and statistics. And almost look at the trends in which aspects can occur.

And economics, I just from when I first started, I've been very interested in it. I like, it's interesting for me to see how the real world application to it, I would say that's a big aspect for my interest in some classes is how I can apply it to the real world and to my future and whatever occupation or whatever I want to end up doing.

Ryan Hinchey: Can you talk about how your interests in comparative government led you to take the course? Were you aware of what would be studied in that course? Or what led you, what was the interest that said okay, this course is applicable to me?

Student 4: I knew that my brother took it beforehand. So that helped at least have a knowledge of what was taught in it. And also I knew some of the, I didn't know all six countries that you study. You study Mexico, UK, Russia, China, Nigeria, and Iran. I didn't know exactly all of the countries that you study, but I did like the aspect of comparing the different regimes and government styles. And also I think it goes back into my interest in the AP US history class. I really enjoyed taking that class, and I didn't really get that same kind of feel in my classes last year just 'cause I didn't have a class that was history-focused. So I wanted to get that from my senior year. So that probably factored into my personal desire to take it.
Ryan Hinchey: Okay. And you mentioned your brother. Do you just have the one older brother?

Student 4: I have an older brother and a younger sister.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay and so what did your older brother did some AP classes then? Or did he do AP and IB like yourself?

Student 4: So he was at, when were at ASL I was fifth through seventh grade and my brother was there eighth through tenth grade. And then when we moved back, he finished his high school eleventh and twelfth grade a big, normal, American public high school. So it was all APs I think in total he took like eleven or twelve AP tests, which was quite insane. But I’ve asked him a few times about how a class is like and how difficult it is or what do I need to know. But it wasn’t like I needed him to tell me exactly what I needed to go through a class, it was more just when I was thinking of what classes to do I’d bring it up to him every once in a while.

Ryan Hinchey: Good. And then you also have another bubble there that’s the conversation with your parents. So how have they influenced your course selection over the years?

Student 4: I think they definitely, it’s been a, you gotta have the conversations with your parents to see also what they think. ’Cause at least with me, my parents have been not very involved, but they have definitely been involved in my university, looking at applications through that. And they have their own opinions on what classes would look good for that. And also they would help me if I wasn’t 100% sure taking a class, they would listen to me about at least in my opinion pros and cons of taking a certain class. And overall, they would just help me figuring out my schedule. We had a little bit of an issue when we moved into “SCHOOL XYZ”, we had a little bit of an issue with the schedule. But it got fixed up pretty quickly, which was good.

Ryan Hinchey: And so what was the issue with your schedule? Was it classes ...

Student 4: Basically, a counsellor at “SCHOOL XYZ”, I don’t remember who it was ’cause he was supposed to be our counsellor but then left that summer. So we were talking through classes with him and then he left that summer before Mr. Farru and Ms. Edgar, well Ms. Edgar was already there but it was the other counsellor before Mr. Farru came in. And he went, we had kind of a discussion on some classes and from what he said, there were a lot more AP options at the school than originally ... so a lot more options according to him than in actuality. For example, he said that I could be slated to AP chem, AP BC calculus,
which “SCHOOL XYZ” has I think offered AP chem once in their past five or six years and I don't think they've ever offered BC calc.

Ryan Hinchey:  Okay.

Student 4:  So that was luckily though Ms. Edgar and Mr. Farru when I came in and my schedule was completely switched from what I was expecting, they helped me figure it out and put in the IB classes that fixed what I was missing. And overall it turned out fine. But that was the only issue from switching in.

Ryan Hinchey:  Okay. And your parents helped with that transition too? They helped facilitate that with the staff at “SCHOOL XYZ”?

Student 4:  Yeah, my mom was mostly involved in that meeting with the counsellors to figure out the classes 'cause my schedule ended up being pretty different from what I initially thought going into junior year.

Ryan Hinchey:  Sure. And so the counsellors that you're talking about are your high school guidance counsellors, your college counsellors. Correct?

Student 4:  Yes, Ms. Edgar and Mr. Farru. Both of them were there helping me figuring out my classes after the previous counsellor who left kind of messed it up. Or at least over-exaggerated what “SCHOOL XYZ” offered.

Ryan Hinchey:  Sure. And so other than that, what experience with the complications with transferring to a school? Have those counsellors helped you in any other ways to choose your courses or helped you along the journey of your course selection?

Student 4:  Yes, they've been very helpful. I've worked a lot with Ms. Edgar and Mr. Farru both. But I've had conversations with them about, we have meetings usually when we're thinking about picking the classes for the next year. Obviously mine compared to the IB students, who their schedule's the exact same the next year, my schedule with it being the weird mix of IB and AP, it needed to be a little bit more talked about what I was planning to do and figuring out the actual schedule. But overall, they definitely helped me with that and helped me with looking at again what universities within [inaudible 00:21:58] et cetera and opinions on classes. 'Cause Ms. Edgar, I believe her son went to “SCHOOL XYZ” so she knew the teachers and how students really interacted with the teachers. Which ones she thought were quite good. Which helped in some of my decisions for my classes. But overall, Ms. Edgar has told me multiple times this year that she hasn't
been worried about me. I'm pretty easy to deal with with academics and classes.

Ryan Hinchey: That's good. And how often do you meet with your counsellors?

Student 4: I wouldn't, I think probably the most often I met with them was just the fall of this year. Mostly due to the college applications and the organising with the college essays and everything like that. So I wouldn't say that often, but probably I have a meeting or at least just a conversation with once a month.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay.

Student 4: Sometimes more if I see, if I'm just walking around school either after school or before school and I run into Ms. Edgar and Mr. Farru and have a conversation. But yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: Sure. Okay. And then your final bubble, you talk about the teacher of a certain course having influence on you for your course selection. Can you explain that?

Student 4: Well I think one of the major importance in choosing a course and enjoying the course is the teacher. Obviously if you personally enjoy the curriculum it doesn't matter as much for the teacher, but for when the curriculum could be difficult or personally you may not find it the most riveting, the teacher is very important to getting the best out of you and making it an interesting class.

For example, I think one of my best teachers I've had at “SCHOOL XYZ”, my English teacher Ms. Armhammer, I've improved vastly from eleventh grade to the end of my high school career in English. While I would personally say from eighth to tenth grade, I didn't improve at all. And I would put a lot of that due to her teaching and just her belief in me that I can actually be a good English student, when most of the time I've been mostly with history, econ, math and science. English was, I wasn't I would say bad at English, but it wasn't one of my strongest subjects. And I think she kind of helped get me the belief that I could actually be quite good at English.

Ryan Hinchey: That’s great, I hope you let her know that. That’s really nice of you to say. I think teachers really appreciate when they hear those things, so that’s great. Now do you know who’s going to be teaching a course when you’re signing up for courses? Did you know the teachers' names?
Student 4: Usually, but at least by the time eleventh and twelfth grade comes around the teachers for the certain classes and different levels of the classes for IB classes, the teacher is pretty much already set. So you know who the teacher coming up will be. However though, I know with my sister in tenth grade, for some of the classes where it’s just English ten or tenth grade, it could be three or four different English teachers. While if you are in IB English and you’re doing literature, it will be with a certain teachers. If you’re doing lit, there’s different teachers who would teach that class. So depending on the course, there may be a, you may know for sure exactly which teacher you’re getting.

Ryan Hinchey: Yup. Has there ever been a time when you actually decided to take a class because a certain teacher teaches it? Or have you decided not to take a class because a certain teacher teaches it?

Student 4: I don’t think there’s been a time when it’s been definite just because of a teacher. For me, either choosing not to take it or choosing to take it. However I would say there’s been times where because a teacher that I really enjoyed having as my teacher is teaching a class, it’s definitely made more likely to take it. For example, for I have the same math teacher for AP stats and AP calc. I really enjoyed having him as my teacher in AP stats and I knew he would be teaching the AP calc class, so I wanted to take AP calc on my own. Not my own, but my interest I wanted to take it. But having him teach it I knew would also be, I know that I would enjoy taking that class.

Ryan Hinchey: That’s good. So just talking through your mind map, do you think there’s anything else on your mind map that you didn’t put that you want to talk about now? Or you think that covers about everything?

Student 4: I think that covers basically everything. I would say the one other thing is that with the university opinions on courses, there was one aspect of my schedule this year, for example taking AP calc it looks good for university but it also was not a difficult class for me because of my IB math class. I’d already learned most of the curriculum in AP calc. Or at least half of it already. So it was one of those things where it looked good for university, but it wasn’t, I was adding another class ’cause I took seven class this year and only six the year before. But it wasn’t too difficult because it was mostly a review kind of class for me.

Ryan Hinchey: And just to be clear, you applied to your universities, were all of them in the US?

Student 4: All were in the US except for McGill, which is obviously in Montreal.
Ryan Hinchey: Yup. And so your mixed curriculum of AP and IB classes wasn't a deterrent for the American or Canadian universities because there were no strict requirements on what you needed to take for your university option?

Student 4: Yeah, for the US and Canadian schools it's a lot ... because of the different styles for a lot of high schools in the US and around the world, they aren't as strict on their requirements and what needs to be taken. They just want you to be challenging yourself in the classes that you are able to take at your school. They won't, it won't hurt your chances if your school doesn't offer the classes that a different school would offer. Like they wouldn't put it against you that a school doesn't offer a certain type of class.

For example, say if a high school in the US didn't offer any APs, they wouldn't put it against you that you never took an AP class. But here, if I was going to the UK, I would've definitely have picked a full IB diploma. And actually, I would probably say if I didn't take the two AP classes in sophomore year, I would say it probably would've been easier at "SCHOOL XYZ" with it being mostly an IB school to have just taken the IB instead of my mix. For example my sister probably isn’t here next year, but if she is I recommended for her to take the full IB at "SCHOOL XYZ".

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. So you're saying then your past experience with the AP programme definitely helped you take AP courses later on?

Student 4: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ryan Hinchey: Do you think the same would be true if you were doing the MYP, the middle years programme of the IB? If you did the MYP, do you think you would've just continued on with the IB programme from there?

Student 4: I think it probably would’ve helped with taking the IB diploma with the MYP. I think probably a similar comparison I would say, yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: Do you feel like you got adequate preparation for taking AP in tenth grade? Did your school talk to you about what it meant and what it could lead to later on? Do you think it was the appropriate time frame in terms of your high school career in terms of being tenth grade, or would you have liked to learn about them earlier? Or would you have preferred to wait a bit?

Student 4: I think my school in tenth grade did a pretty adequate job I would say of explaining. I think being in the Northeast competitive high school, even in ninth grade you already know about the APs. You kind of are
already thinking about your schedule, it's just kind of the culture at those schools. And I definitely knew that I wanted to take AP US history. However you did have to take a placement test almost. It was more so just to see if you could understand the textbook readings and be able to answer questions on them. And so if you were to be put into those classes, however, the parents were able to override the test results. I do know of some people who didn’t get in because of the test, but because parents complained, they got in.

However, then to facilitate that, the first AP test, they don’t ease you into it. The first unit test of the year, it is as difficult as it’s gonna be the entire year. Because they’re kind of trying to, so everyone struggles on that first test. So they trying to almost wheedle out the people who didn’t deserve to be in the course in the first place.

Ryan Hinchey: Sure, that makes sense. So you had mentioned you have a younger sister and giving her some advice. What would be your general advice to anyone that’s younger than you, say going into ninth grade or in ninth grade going into tenth grade thinking about AP, IB, or just high school courses in general? Do you have any advice you’d like to give them?

Student 4: I would say you should take courses that you enjoy because if you’re not, take at least some courses. Obviously you can’t only do a course in the subject that you enjoy 'cause you need to have the variety there. But definitely do a course in something you enjoy. You should also, at least in ninth and tenth grade, be willing to try different courses to see ’cause just because you thought you were gonna do something and then you take a different course, then all of a sudden you’re thinking wait a minute, I really enjoyed that. Maybe I want to focus mainly on that. You should definitely be trying quite a bit.

And then I would, so ninth and tenth grade I think that's probably obviously do your best, get the best grades you can get. But also be willing to try and challenge yourself. And then in eleventh and twelfth grade, that's when I would say probably it's very important to know what universities are thinking and depending on if you’re going to the US or the UK, knowing how they interpret the different classes and the different challenges. And then that with your enjoyment of certain classes I would say would probably be the best combination of figuring out what would be best for you.

Ryan Hinchey: Great. Thinking back on the courses that you took at "SCHOOL XYZ", would you change anything? Would you change what you took or maybe even would you change things that the school offers? Would you like to see something added that the school doesn’t have?
Student 4: One thing that I would say about “SCHOOL XYZ” is that I feel like, I understand why they have APs but with the very limited number and choices they have it really is difficult for someone to have mostly an AP curriculum. So I would personally either have them get more AP classes, which would be difficult for them 'cause they are a very international school and not a lot of people are taking them, or just become a full IB school. I feel like that would almost be beneficial if they just kind of decide which way they want to go. 'Cause I feel like they don't know for sure, but I would probably guess within the next three to four years, they're gonna be almost if not a full IB school.

I would say just based on my courses, I probably the only course I may have changed would've been I took aficionado German. I think I probably either should've continued taking Spanish, which I was taking, or had done aficionado Italian. That was mostly due to the teacher, just 'cause I felt like I didn't really learn enough German in my two years of taking it that it was worth taking it. So personally, that's probably my course that I would have changed.

Ryan Hinchey: So why didn't you take Spanish in grade eleven and twelve?

Student 4: It was a mixture of influence from my brother, 'cause he was taking German at uni and he was enjoying it so I thought okay, maybe I want to take it. And also I kind of wanted to start a new language, but I would say it probably would've been better for me to have just continued taking Spanish or have done aficionado Italian just based on the teachers.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay, that's great. Those are actually all the questions I have for you today. Is there anything that you feel like we haven't covered in the realm of course selection that you feel like you still need to talk about? Or do you feel like we've covered everything today?

Student 4: I feel like we've covered almost everything if not everything, yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay, I'm going to stop the recording now. Thank you.

Interview 5
Interviewer: Ryan Hinchey
Student: “Student 5”
Ryan Hinchey: Okay. We're recording. Hey, Student 5.

Student 5: Hello.

Ryan Hinchey: For the record, can you state your name?

Student 5: My name is “Student 5”.

Ryan Hinchey: You're currently a senior at “SCHOOL XYZ”?

Student 5: Yes.

Ryan Hinchey: Could you please state your citizenship?

Student 5: I am Filipino.

Ryan Hinchey: Anything else?

Student 5: No, just Filipino.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Just so you're aware, this is for my doctoral dissertation at Northeastern. The topic of the presentation is students' course choices how they make sense of their selecting courses at “SCHOOL XYZ”. Today we're just going to go over a few things. I previously had you do the mind map. We'll start talking about that and then go onto some more questions that I have for you. This session being recorded. You will have access to both the transcription and recording afterwards if you want them. They'll be stored for a period of time afterwards and then destroyed. All names and everything else will be kept confidential, so there's nothing that you need to worry about. Your name will not be tied to anything. Nobody will see it except for me and my advisor. Hopefully you should feel free to say anything you want. This is no reflection of you as a student at “SCHOOL XYZ”, but just purely for the purposes of this dissertation. Do you have any questions at this time?

Student 5: No.

Ryan Hinchey: Just so you know, you can stop if you feel uncomfortable at any time. If there are any questions that you have during this, just let me know and we'll proceed accordingly. If you don't have any questions, we'll move right into the mind map. You have your copy of the mind map in front of you?

Student 5: Yes.
Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Looking at the mind map with your name in the centre. We will be discussing all of the circles that you filled out today. Is there one that you want to start with?

Student 5: No.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Let’s just start on left-hand side of your parents, and sort of work clockwise from there.

Student 5: Okay.

Ryan Hinchey: Tell me why you put your parents for one of the circles as being an influence on your course selection over your four years of high school.

Student 5: I think my parents played a huge factor when deciding my courses, and especially my subjects as well. I think my parents are really ... I guess like not push, but like I guess inspired me to pursue like one particular career. I think my dad and my big brother do engineering and so I was like "Oh, I’m going to do engineering as well because that seems really interesting." I think that really made my choice of choosing higher level math and higher level physics and higher level chemistry at the same time.

Ryan Hinchey: When did your parents start talking to you about course selection? Do you remember how early back it was?

Student 5: About the ... like particularly picking the subjects?

Ryan Hinchey: Correct.

Student 5: I guess grade 10 maybe.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Just to be clear, you are taking the IB full diploma, correct?

Student 5: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ryan Hinchey: What are your higher level courses?

Student 5: Higher level maths, physics, and chemistry.

Ryan Hinchey: And standard level?

Student 5: Spanish, econ, and English Literature.

Ryan Hinchey: You haven’t spent your full four years at “SCHOOL XYZ”. Where were you before that?
Student 5: I was in Australia, Perth, International School of Western Australia.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. When you came to “SCHOOL XYZ”, what made you decide to take the IB programme, when you had other options available to you, or did you know what the other options available to you when you moved here?

Student 5: Since I moved here halfway through grade 11, at my old school there was only AP and IB, just like here as well. I chose the IB because I guess ... Well first of all, my sister did the IB as well, so I was like "Okay, [inaudible 00:04:29] I'll do the IB as well." Also, I think IB kind of is a challenge I guess compared to, I mean AP is hard, but I don't know, I found IB a little bit more interesting and challenging.

Ryan Hinchey: When your sister took the IB programme, did you remember your parents speaking to your sister at all about the options that she had when she was going through the programme?

Student 5: No. Not particularly.

Ryan Hinchey: Do you ever remember a time when your parents didn't agree with one of your course selection choices?

Student 5: Yes. I remember because my original subjects were higher level economics rather than higher level physics, and then my dad told me that if I really wanted to be an engineer, it would be best for me to pick higher level physics than economics, so I switched to the higher level physics.

Ryan Hinchey: Keeping in mind your goal of studying engineering at university, is that the plan after you graduate “SCHOOL XYZ”?

Student 5: Yeah, that's the plan.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Do you have a specific type of engineering that you'll be studying?

Student 5: Mechanical engineer.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Where will you be studying?

Student 5: Hopefully at Exeter.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Still need to wait for your IB results, right?

Student 5: Yeah.
Ryan Hinchey: Did Exeter have any, you said your dad suggested you take one of the higher level courses because that would be more applicable to engineering. Did you look at any of the university requirements when you were looking at your course selection?

Student 5: Yeah. Back in Australia I remember looking at UCL as a potential university. I looked at other universities as well, and it said you needed higher level physics and math.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Moving onto the next circle. You talk about teachers and the nature of the subject. Tell me what you mean by that.

Student 5: I think for me, I haven’t been here in “SCHOOL XYZ” for long, but back in Australia we ... I just felt like the actual subject is enjoyable, that’s why I chose that, and also the teachers as well, because there are some subjects where the teachers aren’t that great and that interesting, so I would probably choose like, well I chose the teachers who I think I would find the most … satisfaction, learning, and enjoying. Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: Before you signed up for the courses, did you know who the teachers were going to be?

Student 5: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: How did you know that?

Student 5: From my sister. My old school wasn’t that big, so everyone kind of knew each other, and everyone kind of knew which teacher was doing that. I just knew the teachers well.

Ryan Hinchey: Does the same go for “SCHOOL XYZ” when you were picking your courses at “SCHOOL XYZ”? Did you know who the teachers were going to be?

Student 5: No.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Then the nature of the subject itself, you just found it interesting, you said?

Student 5: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: Was there anything that you had not taken before, but you took in the IB programme, like you hadn’t had experience with?

Student 5: Yeah. I took econ.
Ryan Hinchey: How did you find out what sort of interested you, or how did you find out about econ? What inspired you to take econ instead of another subject within that group within the IB?

Student 5: Once again, I think my sister played a huge ... She told me a lot about what to expect with the IB and what the subjects were like. Here at “SCHOOL XYZ” they offer a lot of the subjects like history, geography, and psychology as well, but in my old school the subjects were pretty limited. I think the school only offered two social sciences. I was kind of just forced to pick one or the other. But I think in terms of the nature of the subject, I found econ interesting from like watching YouTube videos about it, and just like some introductory I guess like crash course thing videos about it.

Ryan Hinchey: Were there any other resources that you used other than your sister and YouTube? Did the school provide you anything that you could've used?

Student 5: No.

Ryan Hinchey: No? So you were kind of just going into it with not a lot of input from the school, and just hoping those decisions ...

Student 5: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Have you ever had any teachers that after taking their course, inspired you to learn more of it, or sort of on the other hand inspired you to learn less or change the subject?

Student 5: Maybe Literature, English lit.

Ryan Hinchey: How did that go?

Student 5: It made me less I guess enthusiastic about the subject. I just found the actual subject a little bit hard for me.

Ryan Hinchey: Is that why you decided to take that as a standard level?

Student 5: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay.

Student 5: I mean, if I had the opportunity to pick lang lit, I would've chosen lang lit, but since my school only offered lit and it was kind of too late to switch, I was kind of forced to take lit.
Ryan Hinchey: Your next level that you talk about is your friends. How did your friends influence your course selection? Think back all years of high school. Did you choose courses because of your friends or things that they said or didn't say? How did they influence you?

Student 5: I think having friends who were like a year above me who are doing the IB as well, it’s kind of like how my sister, like the fact that my sister has as well, they kind of like give me tips on what to do and what not to do. They’re always like “Oh yeah, higher level physics is so hard. Don’t choose that.” I was like, “No, I’ve got to choose it.” Also, my friends in my own cohort, I would also kind of take into consideration what subjects they’re taking, because sometimes it’s kind of hard to go into a subject where you kind of like don’t know anyone and kind of like … I guess, like having no friends [inaudible 00:12:11].

Ryan Hinchey: How did you have these conversations with friends? Are they just informal conversations, or did you-

Student 5: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: How often did you find yourself talking about courses?

PA: Frank [Gerberlily 00:12:26] to the high school office please. Frank Gerberlily to the high school office.

Ryan Hinchey: Sorry about that. How often did you find yourself having these conversations with friends about courses?

Student 5: Not that frequently, but like when … Grade 10 was almost like, was ending. I’m pretty sure we talked about it like three times a week or something like that, and just talking about like “Oh yeah, I’m going to take this subject and then I think this subject …” We’re just like talking about like our expectations about the actual subject and what to hope for and talk about our dreams of getting a seven in the subject.

Ryan Hinchey: But three times a week is fairly often, so during certain times it seems like it was-

Speaker 4: [inaudible 00:13:24].

Ryan Hinchey: … in a big part of your everyday life that you had with your friends.

Student 5: Yeah, yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. I’m curious about your next circle, where you talk about this girl.
Student 5: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: How did this girl influence?

Student 5: She didn't really influence like my IB choices, but then ... Basically we had, I think it was grade 10. We had the choice of choosing art or PE. All of my friends chose PE. Then there’s this girl [inaudible 00:14:05] take art, I was like "I’m going to take art because I like art [inaudible 00:14:11]." Then yeah, I chose art. It was pretty fun.

Ryan Hinchey: So that was just the one year that you chose art?

Student 5: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: After that, you didn’t decide to continue art when you went into IB?

Student 5: No. No. Well when she left, I didn’t do art anymore.

Ryan Hinchey: Did she leave during 10th grade?

Student 5: When 10th grade ended. I did art for the whole year.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. You talked about a little bit this before too, the lack of selection. Your old school had less choices than “SCHOOL XYZ” has, and how you think you’re, and correct me if you’re wrong, you think your selection may have been slightly different if you had more selection like with the English Language or like English Language Literature. So looking back at the selection from your old school versus from here, would there be other choices other than the English that you would have changed in terms of maybe classes that you may have taken if you had the opportunity?

Student 5: I would’ve stuck with my higher levels, so chemistry, physics, and math, and I would probably stay with econ, but then change both my languages. I would do lang lit, and probably like another [inaudible 00:15:52] subject, maybe [inaudible 00:15:53] French or German.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. When you moved to “SCHOOL XYZ”, did you ever think of the AP programme at all, or was it always you were going to continue with the IB programme?

Student 5: Yeah, I was going to continue with the IB programme.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. At your previous school, other than your influences from your sister and sort of knowing about the IB programme, did your school try to explain to you the difference between the programmes?
Student 5: Oh yeah. Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: How did they do that?

Student 5: They kind of made the AP look like a like, American only kind of subject. If you're going to go to America for college, you have to take the AP kind of vibe. The IB ... They kind of made the IB look like "Oh yeah, it works with everyone. If you're going to go to America, you can do the IB. It's fine." But yeah, they kind of just explained the length difference, like how AP is like one year of one subject and then you take another, and you do other subjects as well. But then the IB is like a two year course, and yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: So thinking about your friends who have taken the AP back in Australia, do you think they took it because they were planning on going to the states?

Student 5: Yeah, yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Do you find that to be true? Do you find that the IB is pretty widely recognised, but the AP is more American?

Student 5: I do agree that the IB is more recognised, but I also think it doesn't, well it does matter, but then it doesn't really ... which I guess learning programme you take, because each university's kind of just, they kind of accept everything. It's just different conditions. Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: Good. Now that we've gone through all of the circles on your mind map, have you thought of anything else that you wanted to put as kind of the opportunity to maybe talk about anything else that we've been going through some other things, or do you think that we've covered everything?

Student 5: I think we've covered everything.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. That's fine. Can you tell me about the time when you had the choice between two courses? Tell me about how you made that decision. You said that for econ for example, you went onto YouTube and found some YouTube examples of what taking econ would be like. Is there another example that you can sort of talk about that's like, I have these two choices and this is how I made the decision to take this choice?

Student 5: I would say choosing, is choosing standard level math and higher level math. I would say that, because like ... standard level math is ... because I think at that time, my skill level with math was kind of like
in-between, like if I did standard level math I would do fine, and then if I did higher level math I would struggle. It was kind of that debate whether I, do I want to struggle or do I want to like do well? I think what really I guess pushed me to higher level math, like I said doing the engineering thing, and I guess there was some sort of like aspect of something like pride. I was like "Oh yeah, I have to do higher level math for myself. I know I can do it," like trying to prove something to myself. I was like "Oh yeah, I can do higher level math." Yeah. I think that really pushed me from choosing higher level math, other than like me wanting to be an engineer and like my parents telling me "Oh yeah, you should do higher level math." [inaudible 00:20:49].

Ryan Hinchey: Are you happy with that decision?

Student 5: Oh yeah. I'm happy with that.

Ryan Hinchey: Is it a difficult course, as difficult as you thought it was going to be?

Student 5: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: We'll see when the results come out. Now, you have a younger brother. Correct?

Student 5: Yes.

Ryan Hinchey: And he is in 10th grade now-

Student 5: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: ... at “SCHOOL XYZ”? Presumably he’s at this time going to make the decision what curriculum to follow, or has already made that decision whether to follow the AP or the IB route. Thinking of younger years, your brother’s year and even younger than that, sort of what advice would you give to students in those years who are thinking about their course selection?

Student 5: I mean first of all, probably like ... when choosing a course, you have to know what you want to do in the future, especially in this school, like sometimes you can’t just like freely change subjects. I know Ian, like he wanted to econ but then he couldn’t really because of the schedule, and then I guess that’s one of the tips I guess to kind of like know what you want to do so that there’s no conflict and then you’re kind of set with them. You already have like a set mindset on like oh yeah, I’m taking this subject, I have to do well on this subject, not "Oh, I could switch. If I don’t like the subject I can switch." That’s one tip. Also, it is helpful to listen to other people’s input, but then ultimately it’s your
choice. So I think, yeah. Especially in this school, like you have a lot of opportunities, literally just do what you think is best for you, and do what you think that will help you the most.

Ryan Hinchey: You talked about how this school has a lot of opportunities, but is there anything that you would like to see at this school that the school doesn’t offer?

Student 5: I mean, personally for me I think this school has plenty.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. You talked about switching courses as well.

Student 5: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: Do you know people who have switched, and how easy was it to switch? Did it have any sort of lasting impact on their course selection and then maybe future university plans?

Student 5: I remember one of my friends, he wanted to do higher level business, but then the school didn’t really offer higher level business, so he had to take an online course. I wasn’t really sure how that affected his learning, but for me, if I were to take an online course, I wouldn’t have learned that well because I need a teacher to teach me. I think that’s one of that could probably affect him.

Ryan Hinchey: You also talked about sort of knowing what you want to do in the future. What if you didn’t know what you wanted to do? How do you feel like you would go about selecting courses, especially I mean, because a lot of people are making these decisions at 15 or 16 years old. Did you ever doubt yourself, that engineering, maybe it wasn’t the right path for you?

Student 5: Yeah, I had plenty of moments like that. Yeah. I wasn’t even planning to like, I mean like ... I wanted to be like a teacher, but then like I really wanted to be an engineer as well. But back to the question of like, of ... [crosstalk 00:25:22] if you don’t know what you wanted, I guess just pick the sub ... because if you don’t know what you’re doing, probably pick the subjects that you most enjoy, and then from the actual two year course, I guess make a judgement from there on what you have and I guess decide on that.

Ryan Hinchey: Did your choices in high school, in your courses, then dictate your university placement?

Student 5: To an extent, yeah. But I think they’re ...
Ryan Hinchey: Did you always know that you wanted to study in the UK for university, or did you have other options?

Student 5: I had other options.

Ryan Hinchey: Which were?

Student 5: The Philippines, back home. And maybe Singapore.

Ryan Hinchey: But ultimately you decided on the UK?

Student 5: Yeah, ultimately.

Ryan Hinchey: Why is that?

Student 5: I think it's just the opportunity, because like going back to the Philippines, I could do that like ... Well, I have like the luxury of going back to the Philippines and just studying there, and I guess the same thing for Singapore, because it's closer to home and it's easier. But then here in the UK, I don't know, I think it's like a better opportunity for me to kind of like, yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: You felt that your classes in high school, if you had wanted to, you could've studied in the Philippines and Singapore or the UK with what you had chosen for courses?

Student 5: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: And you could've done engineering at all those places? You could've done engineering in the Philippines or Singapore as well?

Student 5: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Now thinking back, if you had to change anything over the four years in course selection, would you? You talked about English and sort of the opportunities that you had, but sort of minus those opportunities, given what you had to work with, would you change anything?

Student 5: If I had to change anything ... No.

Ryan Hinchey: No?

Student 5: No.

Ryan Hinchey: Good.
Student 5: I would, yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: I mean, ultimately that means that you're pretty happy with the way that things went, right?

Student 5: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: That's great. Those are sort of all the questions that I had for you. Is there anything that like, now that we're talking about that and this whole topic and we're looking back over your four years, reminiscing about all the good times you had, like is there anything that you want to talk about that stands out to you, or do you think you've sort of talked about everything that you wanted to talk about today?

Student 5: Just like my overall high school experience I guess?

Ryan Hinchey: Sure. Yeah.

Student 5: I guess just ... as stressful as like grade 11 to 12 might be, just have fun. If I were to tell past me what to do, I would probably tell myself to I guess kind of ... work hard and play hard and not just play hard and work a little bit. Yeah, because I think like especially in the UK, well for me I have this like perception of like me in the future of like living in a cave, like not seeing sunlight because I'm taking engineering, I've got to study hard, and I don't know. I wished I could've had a little bit more fun in high school. Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: It's okay. Well, we appreciate your hard work. If you don't have anything else, I will just conclude by saying hopefully this research will go a long ways in sort of improving some processes and policies at “SCHOOL XYZ”. We shall see. But I just wanted to thank you for your participation today, keeping in mind that you'll have access to this later on if you want any access to it. I'll provide you with information about when things are finished, so you can look at things if you wanted to. But yeah, I just do want to thank you for your participation because I know you're giving up your time right now, but it is important to get the feedback from students to understand what we as an administration are doing well, and what we can do better, so this feedback is greatly appreciated for that, and for my dissertation, so thank you. [crosstalk 00:30:45] I will stop recording now.

Interview 6

Interviewer: Ryan Hinchey
Ryan Hinchey: Okay, so we're recording. Could you just please state your name for the record?

Student 6: “Student 6”.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. And you are currently a senior at “SCHOOL XYZ”, is that correct?

Student 6: That’s right.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay, and could you please state your citizenship?

Student 6: India.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. And you're only Indian citizen, right?

Student 6: Yeah, that’s right.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. So I just wanted to give you a little bit of background knowledge again. So you’re aware that this is for my doctoral dissertation at Northeastern. The topic of the presentation is student’s course choices and how they make sense of their selecting courses at “SCHOOL XYZ”. Today, we’re just going to go over a few things.

I previously had you do the mind map. We’ll start talking about that and then we’ll go onto some more questions that I have for you. This session is being recorded. You’ll have access to both the transcription and recording afterwards if you want them. It will be stored for a period of time afterwards and then destroyed. All names and everything else will be kept confidential. So there is nothing that you need to worry about. Your name will not be tied to anything, nobody will see it except for me and my advisor. Hopefully you should feel free to say anything that you want. So this is no reflection on you as a student at “SCHOOL XYZ”, but purely for the purposes of this dissertation.

So do you have any questions?

Student 6: No questions so far.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. You can stop if you feel uncomfortable at any time. If there are questions that you have during this, let me know and we’ll proceed accordingly. If you don’t have any questions, then we’ll move right along to the mind map.
So do you have your copy of the mind map in front of you?

Student 6: No but I can just get it in a second.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay.

Student 6: Okay, yes, I have it with me now.

Ryan Hinchey: So it looks like for your mind map you listed five different factors that have influences your course selection. Your interest in subjects, your future academic aspirations, specific teachers in certain courses, past experiences with subject, and perception of rigour by universities or colleges.

Student 6: That's right.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Is there one of those that you'd like to start with. We're going to talk about all five of them, but is there one that you'd like to start talking about first?

Student 6: Let's start with the one on the top, specific teachers in certain courses.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay.

Student 6: And then just move clockwise.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. So starting with teachers in certain courses, you indicated on the mind map that that is a two way factor. So teachers have an influence to you, and you influence them. So can you explain to me how that has come about?

Student 6: So basically, in certain teachers in certain courses, basically it's pertaining to especially one subject I can tell you, history.

Ryan Hinchey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Student 6: The history teacher at my school, she's brilliant. She's basically university level instructor, and I knew for sure that not only did history interest me, but another thing that really forced me to take history as a class is I knew that this legendary teacher would be taking it. So in the two way thing, basically I think it was that the teacher influenced me to take the class, and I feel like I did as well.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. So for history, before taking that class, have you had experience taking history classes?
Student 6: Yeah, I mean throughout school I’d had to take history and I’d always enjoyed it.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. So what history class are you taking with this teacher?

Student 6: It’s Spaniard history, SL.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay, so it’s an IB class?

Student 6: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: And are you doing a full IB, or are you doing IB and AP, or? What-

Student 6: Full IB.

Ryan Hinchey: You’re doing full IB. Okay. So for history, is there a goal to study history after you graduate from “SCHOOL XYZ”?

Student 6: At the moment I’m thinking about probably studying something like international relations or political science. So yeah, for sure history would have influenced that.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay, good. Are there any other teachers that have sort of influenced your decision? As it specifically just the history teacher?

Student 6: I mean, generally all the teachers at my school are very good. But let’s say this one example that really sticks out to me is because she really has a reputation for being an excellent teacher, and she’s made people who didn’t even like history really fall in love with it.

Ryan Hinchey: And does she only teach IB history standard level, or does she teach it at the higher level?

Student 6: Both standard and higher.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Is there a reason you decided to take it at standard level instead of higher level?

Student 6: Yeah, I mean it’s one of my regrets actually that I took it at standard instead of higher because back then I didn’t realise … I didn’t think I’d get much more out of it if I did higher.

Ryan Hinchey: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Student 6: And I thought I’d take higher level French in place of higher level history because I’m not French. I don’t really have any connexion to France, but I
thought it would be a challenge to take higher level French. And while of course I’ve enjoyed that, I feel like if I’d taken history, I’d have gained something more.

Ryan Hinchey: Hmm. So did you have someone at your school who helped you make this decision to take French instead of history? Or how was that decision made?

Student 6: I did discuss it with my high school counsellor, but generally I think it was more of a decision taken by my family and I that’s to try and challenge ourselves by taking French at a higher level. Instead of history. So it’s been a regret for me, but oh well.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. So presumably you decided to take the IB, full programme, in tenth grade moving into eleventh grade. Is that correct?

Student 6: Well I mean, I’ve been taking the IB since ... for most of my life I’ve been in the IB programme.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. And have you been at “SCHOOL XYZ” your entire school career?

Student 6: No, I only cam to “SCHOOL XYZ” the last few months of eight grade.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay so you were in the MYP programme before that? Before the-

Student 6: Yeah. MYP and PYP for a while.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. So would you describe it as sort of a natural progression then to decide to do the full degree programme?

Student 6: Yeah, for sure. I don’t think I was ever considering anything else.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. So would you say going onto the next factor on your mind map, would you say that that is what you were going for when you talked about your past experiences with subjects? Or are there other factors within those past experiences?

Student 6: I mean yes, that’s one of them for sure. My past experiences with subjects, I mean that certain classes I’ve taken in the past. For example, history, or English, things like that. Classes I’ve enjoyed previously. I thought it would be logical to take them in high school as well because I knew I could do well in them and enjoy them.

Ryan Hinchey: So within the IB programme, what are your three higher? IB French?

Student 6: French, lang-lit, and economics.
Ryan Hinchey: Okay. So French, lang-lit, and economics. And then you’re standard levels with MB history, mathematics?

Student 6: History, [inaudible 00:08:47], and math, yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. And would it be fair to say that you enjoy the social sciences more than you do the maths and hard sciences?

Student 6: For sure.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. So that’s why for university, you sort of see yourself studying the international relations or history component.

Student 6: Yeah, for sure.

Ryan Hinchey: So within those classes, your higher level classes, and your standard level classes, would you say that your past grades have been good in those classes and that’s sort of why you chose them? Or when you had the option of choosing the IB programme and you had the different electives within each group, why would you choose an IB biology instead of an IB chemistry for example?

Student 6: So about the grades, yes, that’s part of it because I knew I could do well in French and English because they’re classes that come naturally to me basically. And economics I knew from the times I studied before eleventh grade, but it was always a subject that I’ve been interested in, in reading about and so on. And for biology, it’s basically I wasn’t a big fan of physics and chemistry when I’d learned it as part of overall science in ninth and tenth grade. And so I decided to take biology, it was the one I disliked least.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. You had mentioned your family before and how they sort of influenced some of your decision making. Have you had any older siblings go through the programme before, or are you the first in your family to do this?

Student 6: No I’m the first one. I have a younger sibling, but yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Great. So moving onto the next bubble, the perception of rigour by colleges, do you want to explain what you meant by filling in this?

Student 6: So when I ... a big part of my academic aspirations of course was going to a good university, and I know for sure at least the top universities always care about the rigour of the courses that you took. Have you challenged yourself as much as you can? So while a large part of it I was challenging myself because I like doing academics, I like to think in class, also part of it was how will colleges view this? Will they believe that I’ve challenged myself as much as I can?
Ryan Hinchey: And how do you feel about that? Do you think the IB programme was a challenging programme for you?

Student 6: For sure. I mean the IB, it’s a difficult curriculum, of course. Just within that, which courses are considered to be more rigorous than other and so on, that played a part to an extent.

Ryan Hinchey: Have you spoken to any of your peers about other programmes that they may have taken? Like the AP programme? And have you compared with them how difficult you feel the AP programme is to the IB programme at all?

Student 6: Friends have gone to non-IB schools. I mean, I attended a British school when I used to live in Brussels a few years ago, for a few years.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay.

Student 6: But I don't really know anyone outside the IB.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Moving onto your interest in subjects. I think we covered this a little bit. But do you feel that the IB programme that you've taken has allowed you to explore all the interests that you have? Or do you wish that there are other subjects that are out there for you?

Student 6: Mostly I would say that yes, mostly they have allowed me to explore the things that I like. I mean, I've heard from someone in another IB school that they have a class offered to them that’s something called International Politics, or something like that. And that sort of thing I would really be interested in taking. But overall, yes, I would say yes to your question.

Ryan Hinchey: Within each subject itself, would you ... do you feel that the content that is covered in the subjects aligns with what you wanted to study when you were choosing the subjects? Or do you feel like there were certain things you wish you could have studied that you didn't cover, or vice versa?

Student 6: No, overall I think certainly I've ... there's been a nice variety of content in the classes, and I have studied what I want to study. One thing I was worried about was that history would be all World War 1, World War 2, because that covers a large part of what schools teach in Europe. But no, it was much more diverse than I expected it to be, and that was definitely a good thing, so yes.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay, great. And then your last bubble is your future academic aspirations. Could you tell me what they are?

Student 6: Yeah. So like I was saying earlier, what I generally want to do is something in the sphere of political science or international relations and economics. And while I didn't know specifically, at the time I was choosing my IB courses, I
knew generally the kind of things I wanted to study when I went to university. This generally sort of economics, politics sort of thing. So that played a part because I knew what I’d have to study now so that I can study that later. So in that sense, I knew that to study the social sciences in university I need to take courses like history and economics, languages, now.

Ryan Hinchey: So where have you decided to go to university?

Student 6: Columbia.

Ryan Hinchey: Oh very good. Congratulations.

Student 6: Thank you, I appreciate that.

Ryan Hinchey: And so you’ll be doing a bachelors degree at Columbia. Have you thought about after Columbia? Do you plan on continuing on with education, or have you thought about that? That far in advance yet?

Student 6: Not specifics as such. I mean, I generally have an interest in perhaps doing a law degree.

Ryan Hinchey: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Student 6: But I haven’t put specific thought into it yet. I thought maybe I’ll just survive university first, and after that I’ll have some time to decide.

Ryan Hinchey: So what made you decide Columbia versus ... I’m assuming you had some other options?

Student 6: Yeah. I think it was basically that ... I can tell you, at the end I was choosing. My top three choices were Columbia, USC Berkeley, and [inaudible 00:15:52] Economics.

Ryan Hinchey: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Student 6: And in the end, it was just the freedom of the American education that knocked out LFC because, you know, in America there is a large system you can take courses in a variety of fields. While in the UK, you only study what your course is. And then between Berkeley and Columbia, I think it was just more ... Columbia I more aligned toward the social sciences and toward ... it’s much more international, it’s better at the humanities. I think it was just that in the end.

Ryan Hinchey: That’s good. Okay. So do you feel that there is anything else, some other factors that you want to talk about for the mind map? Now that we’re
going through it, is there anything else that you feel like should be on it, or do you feel like you've sort of covered all your bases?

Student 6: I think I've covered everything actually because let's say I was largely left to my own devices when deciding to decide what courses I was going to take, there was no real pressure from the school or my parents or anything to push me in any specific direction. I was just left to think and so on, but generally you would do just whatever interests you. So it was good.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay, great. So we'll put [inaudible 00:17:13] on my map for the time being. And just move on to some other questions.

So you had said that you were doing a British school in Brussels. Is that correct?

Student 6: Right.

Ryan Hinchey: So when you moved back to the UK, was there a choice in what school you were going to attend? Or did you always know that you were going to be attending “SCHOOL XYZ”?

Student 6: Right, no I mean, I've only been in the UK since eighth grade. This is my sixth country so far.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay.

Student 6: So it's not that I was coming back to the UK, this is my first time-

Ryan Hinchey: Okay.

Student 6: That I was living here. Yeah, I mean I generally had a choice of schools I think.

Ryan Hinchey: So did the ... how did you decide to come to “SCHOOL XYZ”? Was it partly because of the curriculum that was offered, or what made your decision to come to “SCHOOL XYZ”?

Student 6: For one, it was a full IB school, which is not that common here.

Ryan Hinchey: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Student 6: It was generally in the greater London area, so that's the area that we were planning to live in anyway. Aside from that, I was I think thirteen-ish when I moved here, so I wasn't really that involved in the whole school choosing process, but I know that it being an international IB school, it played a large role.
Ryan Hinchey: Good. So thinking about now that you’re at “SCHOOL XYZ”, can you generally tell me about a time when you had to choose between several classes? So you had to sit down, have your course selection guide in front of you, tell me about your decision making process in terms of choosing your courses. What goes on in your head that makes you choose the final courses that you’ve decided to do for your final two years of education? What factors? And it sort of goes back to slightly what we were talking about in the mind map, but I’d like to get a better idea of the decision making process itself that you went through.

Student 6: Right. So a few things that, a few classes that I knew straight away that I wanted to take because of my past interest in them and the fact that I really liked them and I knew I could do well at them. Straight away, three I picked were French … French, history, and economics. Then the rest I had to kind of think about because in English, of course, I had to choose between lit and lang-lit. And I decided to do lang-lit because I thought it would be more useful later for learning academic writing and so on. Literature is more about just studying literature. And I knew that lang-lit would be more about the process of writing and so on. And I found that more interesting, and I thought that would probably be more useful later on.

Ryan Hinchey: Mm-hmm (affirmative)-

Student 6: In math, math isn’t one of my absolute strong suits. And I knew that math HL is only for people who are really really good at math. So I just decided to take standard level. That was quite an easy choice. And then science-wise i had to decide between chemistry, bio, and physics. And my past experiences had shown that I would probably be more partial to bio. So I went with that. At standard level because I still wasn’t a great fan.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. When you were going through the university process of applying to universities, did you receive any advice from any university admissions representatives about any of the courses that you were taking?

Student 6: Not that I can recall, no.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. To apply to LFC, did you have to do any specific higher level courses, or were they just looking for an overall IB point total?

Student 6: Yeah, no, for my courses it was just IB point total and just two essay based subjects. That’s what they wanted.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Great. So if you were talking to a student who is going to be deciding between … different curricula, whether that be the IB, the AP, other experiences. It might be a British programme. Based upon your own
experiences, what advice would you give to a student who’s choosing courses in high school?

Student 6: Well so I’ve done the IB my whole life except for that brief stint at a British curriculum school, so I obviously can’t speak from any great personal experience in other programmes, but from what I understand and what I’ve experienced in the IB, the rigour and the breadth of what you learn are amazing because you get to take six classes. Well, at least in the British school, I think you take three. And because of that, you have room to choose so much more and to learn so much more than you would otherwise. Also, you have extra things that you have to do like the extra essay and theory of knowledge and so on.

You receive written academic dissertation on most by the end of your high school. And then TOK is a challenge to look at the world differently from what you normally would. And I know of course, the rigour of the IB is also considered to be much more great than most other programmes. I know that it’s considered a harder system. So I mean, for sure the IB is an incredible experience. I’d recommend it to anyone who is willing to work hard. Anyone who is actually interested in academia.

Ryan Hinchey: And so you said you have a younger sibling, correct?

Student 6: Yep.

Ryan Hinchey: What grade are they in?

Student 6: Seventh grade.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. And are they at “SCHOOL XYZ” as well?

Student 6: Yep, same school.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. And are they doing the MYP programme now?

Student 6: Yep.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. So have you given them ... based on your experience, have you given them advice about courses to take at MYP, or in a full diploma programme?

Student 6: So I mean in MYP they have to ... I mean, they don’t have a list of what courses they take, I don’t think. But I haven’t discussed IB courses with them yet because it’s still early days, but I know for sure that I will when the time comes.
Ryan Hinchey: Great. If you were to choose your high school courses again, would you change anything?

Student 6: Yeah, I think I would swap ... honestly, I think I would do for-higher, I would do higher level history as well because higher level French isn't a great ... isn't really that much extra work from standard level French. So I would probably take for-highers and take higher history because it wouldn't really be any great extra increase in workload.

Ryan Hinchey: And you'd keep ... in terms of the subjects, you'd keep all the same subjects as well?

Student 6: Yes, yes probably.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Thinking back at your MYP programme, do you think that adequately prepared you for your full diploma classes?

Student 6: Yes, I would say so. It was just a continuation of the same style of learning, for sure.

Ryan Hinchey: I'm looking to see if there's any other questions. What do you think you have learned about yourself in thinking about the questions that we asked about you today? Or have you learned anything? Sort of thinking back about the courses that you've taken, throughout your entire high school career, has that made you think about things that you do, or the way that you are educated? Now that you are a senior, have you had a chance to stop and think back upon your high school career and you as a student?

Student 6: Well certainly, I've thought in more detail about what drove me to take the courses that I did, than I have before. I mean, I knew generally why I chose them, but this has made me think a little harder about exactly what went into my decision. I think that's been useful because that will probably help me. If I were to give advice to someone else, it's ... I'll have a clear understanding of why I chose the subjects that I did. Because generally I'm happy with the results. I mean, I'm happy with the courses that I took, so knowing exactly why I took them would be helpful if I ever have to give advice to anyone else on course selection.

Ryan Hinchey: Yeah. It sounds like your experiences with the IP and through classes like Theory of Knowledge, you are definitely a better thinker. Even just from what we're talking about today, it sounds like you are able to process through things in a logical, clear sense, which I think is probably a commendable feature of a programme like the IB. Would you say that's fair to say?
Student 6: Certainly. I mean it’s ... IB for me, I’ve never experienced a situation where I’ve just been told to memorise something. I’ve never been told to just remember something and just know it because there’s always been a greater depth of understanding in all the classes. It’s all been explained why something is the way it is, especially in history. My teachers always work to help us see patterns in the various separate years that we’ve been studying. We’ve never learned anything in isolation, I think is the main crux of this. Everything is always worked in complement with each other.

Ryan Hinchey: That’s fantastic. Well that’s all the questions I have for you. Is there anything that you have for me? Is there anything that you feel like we haven’t covered today, or? You feel like you’ve expressed-

Student 6: No I think [inaudible 00:28:42]. Yeah, I think I’ve ... I think it’s been pretty good. I think we’ve covered everything that really drove me to make the decision that I did.

Ryan Hinchey: Great. Well, I wish you the best at Columbia next year. And definitely don't be a stranger to “SCHOOL XYZ”, and hopefully we’ll see you around the halls soon.

Student 6: Absolutely, thank you.

Ryan Hinchey: Thank you.

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Interview 7

Interviewer: Ryan Hinchey
Student: “Student 7”

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Hi, “Student 7”. Could you please state your name for the record?

“Student 7”: My name is “Student 7”.

Ryan Hinchey: And you’re currently a senior at “SCHOOL XYZ”?

“Student 7”: Yes, I’ve just graduated.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Could you please state your citizenship?
“Student 7”: I am Australian and British.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. I just want to make you once again aware that this is for my doctoral dissertation. The topic of the presentation is student course choices and how they make sense of their selecting courses at “SCHOOL XYZ”. Today we're just going to go over a few things. I previously had you do the mind maps. We'll start talking about that and then we'll go on to some more questions that I have for you.

This session is being recorded. You'll have access to both the transcription and recording afterwards if you want them. It'll be stored for a period of time afterwards and then destroyed. All names will be kept confidential, so there's nothing that you need to worry about. Your name will not be tied to anything, nobody will see it except for me and my advisor. Hopefully, you should feel free to say anything you want.

Just a reminder, this is no reflection on you as a student at “SCHOOL XYZ”. It's just purely for the purpose of this dissertation. Do you have any questions at this point?

“Student 7”: No, not at this point. Thank you.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. If at any time you feel uncomfortable, you are welcome to stop. If there are questions that you have during this, let me know and we'll proceed accordingly. If you don't have any questions, we'll move right into the mind map. Do you have your copy of the mind map in front of you?

“Student 7”: Yes, I do.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. So looking at your mind map, is there any one of those factors that you wrote down that you'd like to start with?

“Student 7”: Probably in terms of starting big, decided to choose the IB because I still didn't know at that point when I was making my decision about what to study in my final two years, where I wanted to go to university. And so, I chose the IB as I felt like it gave me flexibility to study an internationally rigorous programme, but also gave me flexibility to choose where I wanted to go at the end of the day and didn't kind of tie me down to any particular place. It's much more internationally around both in Australia and England, which were the two places I was considering and so, I felt like it was the best option for me considering my current situation of being an [inaudible 00:02:49] still, but not knowing if I wanted to return home to study.

Ryan Hinchey: So, you're doing the IB programme, how many years have you been living in England?
“Student 7”: I’ve been living in England since 2011. So, I’m coming up to six and half years I think. Seven and a half?

Ryan Hinchey: And have you spend all those years at “SCHOOL XYZ”?

“Student 7”: Yes, I have.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. So, you were entering grade nine and 10, did you have ideas of when you were picking those classes, were you doing the MYP programme, or were you just doing regular classes at that point?

“Student 7”: I was doing the MYP programme at that point.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. So, did you have a choice of classes at that time that you could choose from?

“Student 7”: Not necessarily. We had to do the standard sciences, maths, Englishes, languages. The only option we were really given was in terms of the arts. So, I chose drama as an arts. Primarily because I heard it was one of the easier ones and didn’t have any artistic or musical ability that I thought I could bring to the other two classes. I think we didn’t have any other options beyond our arts choices.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. And then when you’re choosing your IB courses in 10th grade going into 11th grade, what three higher and what three standards did you choose?

“Student 7”: I chose high level biology, chemistry and psychology and standard level math, french b and English a: language and literature.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. And when you were thinking about where to study university, whether it be in England or Australia, did you look at the entrance requirements for some programmes?

“Student 7”: Yes, I did. I wanted to have a rough idea of what was required by each university for the separate courses because I felt like ... I feel like with entrance requirements, they also give you the subjects that they’re looking for, so that kind of did help me narrow down my decision as to which ones to do, particularly in terms of the sciences because I knew that was something that I really liked and really enjoyed and something that I was good at quite naturally without having to put a lot of effort in. And because I knew that IB was a very difficult and rigorous programme, I decided that it was important for me to choose classes that I liked and enjoyed, but also classes that I felt like I was good at, I wouldn’t have find difficult studying in my own time.
So, something that I had decided to kind of look at the ... I looked at a couple universities in Australia and a couple universities over here in 10th grade and just kind of saw that there was general pattern of requiring biology and chemistry, but actually more so chemistry at high level. So, that kind of helped me to make my decision in terms of that.

Ryan Hinchey: Now, is that for a specific course that you're looking or were you just looking at general entry requirements?

"Student 7": That was for the course of medicine. So, I didn't decided to do medicine until probably the last half of ... around Christmas time of year 10, I decided that I would look into a career of medicine. Originally, I was looking at marine biology, which needs similar subjects anyway. But I decided that medicine was more my thing and I started doing some work experience around that and realised that I really enjoyed it and I thought that I would really enjoy a career in it. So, I decided to choose medicine at about halfway through year 10, and then that kind of really helped me to finalise my subject choices into my high particularly, because they're all very applicable to the subjects of medicine and all stand in entry requirements within medicine.

Ryan Hinchey: And where did you find that information out from the university? Were you just looking on their websites? Or did you speak to anyone at the universities that you were looking at?

"Student 7": I tended to go on the website generally for almost all of them. If I had any questions about the entry requirements, then I would call them. But it was pretty much all on websites, especially for Australia.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. So, do you know where you're ultimately going to study next year? Have you made a decision about where you're going?

"Student 7": Yes. So, my first choice university is St George’s University of London, which is just in London, with the aim of studying medicine.


"Student 7": Thank you very much.

Ryan Hinchey: And so, I guess that kind of leads right into your next bubble, which is your career choice of medicine. And we sort of talked about that a little bit. Other than just sort of knowing that you wanted to do that in grade 10, were there things that sort of lead you up to knowing that you wanted to study medicine?

"Student 7": I think it was mainly in year nine I was convinced I wanted to do marine biology because I grew up in Australia and thought it was a great job to have
because you spend all your days at the beach sort of thing and then, I realised in talking to family friends and family that it wasn't ... I properly had a very idealised version of that career in my head and it wasn't going to be like that much at all. So, I decided maybe that wasn't quite the right thing to sort of look at. And so, then I started looking around to other scientific careers and looking at research, or biochemical engineering and things like that. When I was looking at them, you can read on the university, just a general blurb about the cost and what graduates tend to do with ... you know, where they go and I realised that it probably wasn't ... especially after doing my extended essays in the IB. I did a chemistry extended essay.

So, I had over 24 hours of lab time to get my final results just to be able to write my essay. I think that experience also lead me to realise that I don't think I would enjoy being stuck in lab all day sort of science. I feel like I'm much more of a people person. I enjoy working with people and you know, working together to solve a common problem. So, then I was able to rule out things like research or biochemical engineering because that's a lot of heavy lab work.

So then, I started originally looking at nursing. I always go to Australia for Christmas and when I went for Christmas one year my grandparent's neighbours are both nurses and they invited me over just to give me some advice and stuff. They said with the grades that I was currently getting in year 10, that I have the grades in order to do medicine and that nursing is probably just as difficult as medicine, but if I wanted to make more ... they just kind of gave me an overview of what they do in their standard week. It kind of made me realise that maybe I would be more suited to a career as a doctor.

Ryan Hinchey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

“Student 7”: So, I think that was one of the deciding factors in terms of encouraging me to go as doctor, but then there was a lot of talking with my parents and my family as to what I would be suited to. Then I did a lot of ... especially for medicine, you have to do a lot of work experience anyway. So, I used a lot of work experience opportunities to kind of realise and understand what it was like in the day to day life of a doctor and that kind of helped to solidify that my decision was the correct one, that I would really enjoy to work in an environment like I had done in my work experience situations. So, I think that was probably the main thing, just kind of ... it was definitely a lot of talking with my parents and family and friends about what they had done, or if they had known someone looking at a similar career and how they found it, was probably very influential on my decision. But also the fact that I knew that I really enjoyed the sciences and I definitely wanted a career in that, which helped me to narrow it down.
Ryan Hinchey: Sure. I used to live in Australia myself, so I know what you’re talking about with the infatuation of the- "Student 7": Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: [crosstalk 00:11:52] "Student 7": Oh, yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: So, when you’re talking to your grandparents, your parents and your friends, had any of them gone ... other than your grandparents who are doing nursing, had any of them taken the IB programme before? Any of your friends or anyone that you know of had taken the IB programme before and then gone into medicine that you talked to?

"Student 7": No, I didn’t. One of my current friends in my current year, he’s also applied to medicine. There’s only me and one other person who have actually applied to medicine in my year.

Ryan Hinchey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

"Student 7": His older sister actually has done the IB and I spoke to her a bit during a career day at the end of year 11, after I’d already made my decision. But talking to her also kind of helped me to realise that it is definitely a career that I want to go into. She kind of helped to lay out the general career path of a doctor, which was also helpful. But I haven’t spoken to anyone other than her.

Ryan Hinchey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

"Student 7": I didn’t speak to her for very long and by that time I’d already made my decision. No one in my family has ever done the IB before. They all did local Australian programmes.

Ryan Hinchey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

"Student 7": And none of them in my family have done medicine either. So, I was a bit of the guinea pig.

Ryan Hinchey: So, are you the oldest child? Or do you have any siblings?

"Student 7": Yes.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay.

"Student 7": Yes, I have two younger siblings.
Ryan Hinchey: Okay. So, when you moved over, do you remember if when you moved over from Australia, was going to an IB school important for your family? Was that a reason that you chose “SCHOOL XYZ”?

“Student 7”: Yeah. So, I think it was important to my family. I finished primary school in Australia and because of the way the hemispheres were, I was coming back and doing another six months of year six.

Ryan Hinchey: Oh.

“Student 7”: Which in Australia is the end of primary school and then you move onto a secondary school. You very rarely have it all on one campus. But because our contract was only for three years, it got extended halfway through. But our original contract was only for three years, so it was important for my family to be able to have that fluidity that if I was halfway through the programme that I could easily fit back into in another country if worse came to worse and we ... halfway through the three years we moved, that I could kind of slot back into the same curriculum without too much hassle of having to learn everything. Our main reason for choosing the IB I think, was because the other option was A levels. So, we did the calculations and actually at the end of the contract I would’ve been halfway through my GCSEs, which is not applicable in any way, shape or form to the Australian curriculum. So, my parents and I kind of made the decision that at least with the IB, I could transfer across nations without the difficulty that would kind of entail in terms of other curriculums that are more local to a particular country.

Ryan Hinchey: Sure. And so, then when you're thinking about the courses that are not required for a career in medicine, basically for a career in medicine, the non science courses, sort of like the English courses that you’re taking, the language courses that you're taking. Obviously they are prescribed from the IB, that you need to take a certain class in group one, a certain class from group two and so on and so forth, but how did you decided for those classes within each group, which one to take?

“Student 7”: Well for my maths class, I originally in year 10, I’d been doing high math from year six until year 10 and then, I decided that I didn’t need higher maths for my IB diploma so that I could just kind of move down to standard level because within the higher level year 10 programme in “SCHOOL XYZ”, essentially you do 80% of the IB standard level course because it’s designed to prepare students for the IB high level course in the maths. And so, I decided instead of moving up with most of my class, up to the high level class because I didn’t need high level maths, that I would just dock down to a standard level class.

So, that was a really good decision I think because I had done a lot of the course before, so it wasn't necessarily new material. It was just a lot of
revision. It moves at a much slower pace than I learned it in year 10, so I felt much more relaxed. So, that was I chose standard level math and I didn’t go to math studies because I thought that was too simple for me and I do enjoy the challenging subjects within the math studies course, such as integration and calculus. So, I decided to stay in SL because it still gave me a very good foundation and was recognised by universities everywhere, but it wasn’t I’m trying to say I don’t know the word. It wasn’t super simple.

Ryan Hinchey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

“Student 7”: ... for me because I do find that I enjoy the challenge of still learning new things. I think with the math SL course, it gave me that. And then, I chose my A language as language and literature primarily because I heard it was the easiest one.

Ryan Hinchey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

“Student 7”: Which is probably a horrible reason to choose anything, but I heard it was the easiest one and it also required ... I looked at the requirements online, in terms of how many books you had to read a year and it was the least number of books that you had to read. I decided that considering the intensity of doing high level biology, chemistry and psychology and the amount of lab works and stuff that I would have to do with those in my high levels, that I needed something that was going to require a lot less reading, especially with biology because that’s a lot of memorization. So, I chose that in order to give me a subject that I was still relatively good at, but that I didn’t have to put as much effort into as for example, a literature course because I wouldn’t have to read as many books. So, I think that was the main reason I chose my English course.

With French, I was doing standard level French in year 10, but I was in the class that was prepping us for standard level French. So, I kind of just decided to stick with it and to do standard level French because I originally assumed that universities didn’t really acknowledge, especially in Australia and the UK, didn’t really acknowledge ab initio. However, I didn’t research that very thoroughly because it is acknowledged as a standard level, even if it’s ab initio.

Ryan Hinchey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

“Student 7”: So, I think if I was to choose again, I would probably choose French ab initio because language is definitely not my strong point and I feel like my French teacher for the first part of the two years, probably wasn’t the best teacher. So, I don’t feel like I ... I didn’t feel very confident that I knew the materials that were required to know in the exam. So, I feel like my standard level French probably caused me a lot more heartache than it should have and so, I
think if I were to ... and I'm advising my sister. My sister’s two years younger than me, so she's just about to head into the IB. I’m advising her to take ab initio languages, especially if you’re taking very science-based high levels because with the sciences it's a lot to juggle, especially when you have IAs and you have lab work, which you have to stay after school for. I found that French was an unnecessarily hard subject that I could've avoided if I had done ab initio, but yeah.

So, I think I probably should've chosen French ab initio considering how much I'm not naturally able at French because French standard level, I found, was still very difficult even for people who’d been speaking it for years. So, yeah I think that those were the main reasons. But yeah, if I had done it again, if I had known what I know now, I probably would've done ab initio to save myself a lot of work.

Ryan Hinchey: Can I ask you about that? So, for ab initio, it's designed for students who have never taken language before?

“Student 7”: Yes.

Ryan Hinchey: And would “SCHOOL XYZ” have allowed you to take ab initio even though you had taken French in 10th grade? Do you know that, if they would or would not have allowed you?

“Student 7”: I know there was someone in the same class in my French class in 10th grade, who you know, had meeting with the school and said, "I want to dropped ab initio." They were very against the idea, I think, originally.

Ryan Hinchey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

“Student 7”: But after a while, they said, "All right." But then, as soon as we were in the French SL class in IB, a lot of us did find that we wanted to drop because we just thought that French level was a lot higher than we originally had anticipated and that it was going to be a lot more work and a lot of the people in my french SL class did not need French SL. They didn't need French at all. So, especially because a lot of us had very science-based courses, we needed a simple subject to help us be able to focus on our very content-heavy courses. I know a lot of people in my French class did want to drop ab initio and there were a few people who had meetings, but that wasn't necessarily allowed.

So, I think that was a lot of ... because I had been speaking French at the school for a while, they were very reluctant and I can understand the reasoning behind that. But I feel that students need to be given the opportunity to make load easier on themselves if they can because it is a very rigours course and at the end of the day, if the university does not require a
SL course, a French B SL course and would fully accept an ab initio course, then I think the students should be allowed to make that informed decision and to drop. I know a couple of people in my class would not be allowed to drop.

Ryan Hinchey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

"Student 7": And so, I think that it probably would've ... I think we all tried really hard and we studied very hard at the end, but it probably would've saved all of us a fair bit of stress, I think if we had done ab initio and I think you know, we probably were suited to the SL and the complexity and the difficulty of the SL class, but we kind of just needed the easy points. We didn't really need another challenge considering all of our other classes that we were taking and all of the other constraints that were put on us. So, I think ... yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: So, who did your peers talk to and who made that decision about who could drop to ab initio and who had to stay in SL?

"Student 7": I think it was primarily our old IB coordinator. We changed IB coordinators halfway through.

Ryan Hinchey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

"Student 7": ... the two years. And it was our old IB coordinator that ... I think they had to have a meeting with the French teachers and the IB coordinator to decided whether, say the student was getting low enough grades in order to suffice a drop and university ... I think college counsellors may have been called in. I don't think they were, because I think if the student was aware of where they wanted to go, then they could just bring the supplying information. I think it was mainly the IB coordinator who had the final say in who can change course subjects and things like that.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Earlier you said that you had taken a class because some of your friends said that it was ... you had heard, sorry. You had heard that it was the easiest course, who did you hear that from? Was it from your friends that you heard that?

"Student 7": Yeah. It was primarily from the people who were in the year above me.

Ryan Hinchey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

"Student 7": Yeah, so just the year group above us and you know, through kind of friends that my mom had made whose kids had done the IB and you know, their recommendations for making it easier and kind of just which ones were the slightly easier course. I'm sure just considering my load, I felt that people said either SL ... a lot of people my grade chose to do SL language and
literature because it is a slightly simpler course, especially when you look on the course requirements in terms of books being read, things like that. Not a lot of my decision but more kind of prompted my decision, was the advice I was given from parents who had gone through the IB before with their children and our neighbour next door, she was the year above me and she gave me a bit of advice for when I chose my course subjects as well.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. And so, you had talked about reading the course requirements. Did the school make those available to you and did the school give you any information about choosing courses? Did they hold any information sessions that you found helpful or unhelpful

“Student 7”: Yeah, no, they did have ... especially for Englishes and stuff, they did have an information evening where we could go and see what all the kind of ... the heads of department came and said you know, this is the cool course to choose and stuff. But I think in a lot of the classes, we would ask our teachers and be like ... especially because the MYP kind of do a general class. Like, if you do the sciences, you do chemistry, biology and physics kind of with the same teacher. So, you know, I spoke to a fair few of my teachers and said, "What kind of courses do you think I would be best suited towards in this kind of group?" Specifically for stuff like English and math. And then, I also spoke with teachers and stuff after classes towards the middle of year 10 and was like, awesome. They kind of sat down and looked over your best grades kind of in this part of a course, which would relate to this part of the IB course.

So, particularly in English, my teacher in year 10 was great and we did a lot of stuff in kind of media studies and things like that. I really enjoyed the unit and he said, "Well if you enjoyed this, this is more heavily featured in the language and literature course." So, that was also another reason why I chose it as well because it was something that I enjoyed. Some teachers did hand out kind of little leaflets saying, "This is how many books you have to read, this is how many things you have to do, internal assessments and the weighting of each thing," which was very handy. I mainly remember getting that kind of information for English, just because I think there was a lot of people that were confused about the main differences between language literature and just literature. So, I think that was very handy as well, in deciding which one was the best course for me.

Ryan Hinchey: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Do you wish you had that same information from your other courses and your teachers?

“Student 7”: I think probably just for languages in general, just both english and second languages. I think that would be helpful. I also think ... because I think with the sciences and things like that, you tend to know very quickly ... you know at the beginning of the year. They go through all the course content,
particularly in the sciences because it's quite a structures programme. So, that was very helpful and kind of helped people to decided in the first two or three wees if this course wasn't for them or if it was. But yeah, I think mainly in languages because that's kind of the one with not the most acronyms, but just with a lot of acronyms and a lot of general confusion about what's required in every task. And because I think with a lot of the sciences and stuff, we're all told in 10th grade it's one internal assessment, which is 25% and the rest is exams. So, it's fairly simple, but with languages it's like, oral presentations and debates and then, internal assessments and then this, that and the other. I think that just because it was an overwhelming amount of different aspects that made up different amounts of your grade, it was quite overwhelming.

Ryan Hinchey: Hmm. Now thinking about the IB and how it's set up, we've talked about how languages are not your favourite subject. If you didn't have to take one class from each group, would you have restructured it yourself and taken more classes within a certain subject or less classes, other than the language one that we've talked about already?

“Student 7”: I would definitely drop ... I said to my friends that if I was doing A levels and I had to do four subjects, I know most of them dropped the fourth one and ended up doing three.

Ryan Hinchey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

“Student 7”: But I would happily do all and do my biology, my chemistry and my psychology and my math and just completely drop languages because it doesn't pertain to what I do. I can see the applications of math in my future career, but I cannot see the applications particularly at the moment of my French ability to talk about and debate euthanasia in French. So, think it was just mainly the languages. But if I had the ability, I would consider taking an extra science and an extra physics, for example. But then again, I probably wouldn't take another science because with physics, whilst I quite enjoy it, I don't think I was the best at it, so it was pretty clear for me that out of the three main sciences, the biology, the chemistry and the physics, that my strong points were definitely biology and chemistry.

So, yeah. So, I think I probably would've enjoyed taking an arts subject if I didn't have to take ... because instead of my arts, I chose chemistry. You know, I felt like a lot of students who took that within their IB ... I had a lot of friends who did that and took an arts, like a drama or visual arts as their sixth subject and they ... I feel like whilst it was very stressful because it was a bit of an intense workload, they seemed to enjoy it because it was something different than you were doing. It wasn't a lot of memorising or a lot of ... there was a fair bit of writing for those. But they had a bit more creative expression in a class where it was a bit more relaxing for them as well. So, I think I
probably would’ve enjoyed doing something just a bit ... like not take, not only stereotypically academic course. Like, something like design technology might’ve enjoyed doing, where you’re doing kind of different types of engineering and using 3D printers and stuff. Just something that’s a bit less academically stressful because I feel like my course was very academically intense.

Ryan Hinchey: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Thinking about your psychology course, had you previously taken any psychology classes before choosing to take psychology?

“Student 7”: No, I hadn’t. But I had kind of read into the subject and realised that it does have a lot of applications to medicine as well. So, that was kind of my main reason. Originally, I was going to take geography because I quite enjoyed that in year 10.

Ryan Hinchey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

“Student 7”: But I talked to the school about it and that wasn’t a course that was offered at our school. So then they said, “What would you take instead?” And I said that I knew I didn’t really want to take history because I wasn’t very good at memorising all the dates, so I said that psychology because I could the applications to ... especially just mainly to my career and I knew that our teacher was a very good teacher and he made sure the students were really well prepared for the exam. So, I think that was also a contributing factor because I knew that I was going to get taught the syllabus well and I’d kind of heard from friends and from my neighbour who was a year above me, that it was kind of a difficult class, but it wasn’t super abstract and hard to wrap your head around kind of thing. In the cases of biology and chemistry typically it was like, you memorised these essays and you need to regurgitate this information for the exam. And then, for paper three it was like, can you analyse this study?

So, I felt like those were skills that I kind of already had developed in a few of my other classes, but this class shouldn’t be incredibly difficult. I ended up really enjoying psychology a lot.

Ryan Hinchey: Good. You had mentioned that you read into it a little bit, do you remember what you read into? Like, was it magazines, journals? Just course descriptions in general?

“Student 7”: I think I kind of just googled it. I know that sounds silly, but just to kind of see what it was about. I didn’t have a great foundation of psychology at all, but then again, not a lot of us did. So, our teacher was very good and gave us the first kind of month or two, we had a great introduction to what it was about and then, we kind of started on the course work, which I think was very
helpful to the mindset of how we should be thinking about the course and how we should be preparing for the exam.

Ryan Hinchey: Hmm, okay. Now you had mentioned something about courses that weren’t on offer. Thinking about all the courses that are available at “SCHOOL XYZ”, are there any courses that you wish the school offered that they just don't?

“Student 7”: Not for me, particularly. I think a lot of my courses were there. The only one as mentioned was geography, which I was originally planning on taking.

Ryan Hinchey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

“Student 7”: I can't really think of any other off the top, but I know a few of my friends wanted some of the more creative courses. One of my friends was looking into doing IB dance, but that wasn't available at the school, but it was available at our old school. So, it was a bit of that. But I know that this last year, the year below me, there was enough interest in the subject of sports science that they were able to introduce sport science.

Ryan Hinchey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

“Student 7”: And there was enough interest in ... oh God, what was it? Business management. In my year, they were able to start up a business management class. So, I think that ... and especially in my year, there was a lot of native languages. Like, there are so many native languages that were you know ... native language teachers that were brought in and a lot of people in my year needed three in a class I think, in order for the school to provide the teacher for it. So, yeah. So, I think that in terms of the languages, they were very good in accommodating people if there was a large group of people. But I also know that there were two or three people in my year this year, who did self study. And so, they kind of Skyped with their teacher and stuff, which I think was good but I know that they had to personally pay for that.

So, I think the school in general is pretty good, but I think that there's ... I'm not too sure how much they year 10s and stuff are consulted about ... I know that I wasn’t, I’m not sure if it's changed. But when I went through year 10, we weren’t really asked if there was any courses that weren't available that we would like and I don’t know if my sister has been either. So, yeah. I’m sure the school is probably managing that somehow, but I’m not too sure how.

Ryan Hinchey: Maybe some earlier consultations, earlier meetings with grades nine and 10 might mean that the demands of students might be a little bit different than what is actually on offer for the courses.
“Student 7”: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. But I understand the kind of hesitance towards doing that, especially because so many people at the end of year 10 and the beginning of year 11, is a very transient sort of time for people.

Ryan Hinchey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

“Student 7”: So, I understand that's probably difficult to get a gauge on what kind of students are going to be interested in that considering how transient it is.

Ryan Hinchey: Yep. Now sort of the last questions I have for you sort of revolve around the younger years and you said that you have a sister. You have two younger siblings, correct?

“Student 7”: Yeah, yes.

Ryan Hinchey: So, thinking about them and sort of going through this process and leading up into the course selection for grades 11 and 12 and just choosing course in general, and I know you had mentioned sort of about being specific to the course that you want to study, but do you have any other advice that you could offer your younger siblings or any younger person who's interested in studying not just medicine, but anything?

“Student 7”: I think probably the best thing for them to do is to kind of realise what subjects they're good at and determine that in the younger years. So, determine what subjects you really enjoy doing and if you can see yourself doing that subject, or doing something relating to that subject for a long amount of time. I've been telling my sister, "Can you actually see yourself in the job?" She's interested in engineering. "Can you actually see yourself in a job in engineering? Do you think that you would enjoy it?" I think a lot of what I would be telling my younger siblings was, "Make sure you're not just doing a job because you think it might be profitable and might make money." You actually have to make sure you do a job that you enjoy, but also take into consideration that at the end of the IB … you know, I think they're both looking at university. You do want to come out with some employment prospects.

So, I think especially for my sister and brother, I really have recommended doing things around the subject. For example, I did a robotics competition to see if I actually enjoyed engineering. And turns out, I really love working in a team but I'm probably not the best engineer. So, I've said to my brother and sister, "Make sure you do things you know, a robotics competition if you're interested in that sort of area. If you're not then at least you've ruled it out that you don't like, so you don't have to explore that avenue any further." I've said to my siblings that work experience is probably the best way that you'll be able to gauge if you actually like something and that if you do work experience around the subjects, around the careers that you think you might
like, then that gives you a more realistic experience as to what will be expected of you in later years.

But I also encourage them not to put too much pressure on themselves because it is, I feel like, put on quite young and a lot of people can tend to panic and not really quite know ... if they don't know exactly what they're doing in the final years, then they'll panic and you know, freak out. But I've just kind of encouraged them to just keep exploring and not necessarily be completely closed towards to any particular subject. If you don't enjoy languages, then that's fine. But don't completely try and sign out of them because you still have to them in the IB. You need to be able to be enough of an all rounder to do the IB. If you don't feel like you're an all rounder and you'd rather focus on three subjects, I've encouraged them to consider something like A levels, or the Australian programme where you can specialise a lot more and not have the stress of dealing with a bunch of subjects that you might not be the best at every single one of them.

Then I kind of have encouraged them to not feel ... I think of some people in my year felt a lot of pressure from parents. I've kind of encouraged my siblings to like ... you know, at the end of the day it is going to be you sitting at that desk or doing whatever you're doing. So, you have to do something that you're going to enjoy.

Ryan Hinchey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

“Student 7”: You don't want to do a year of that and then completely hate it. I think the final thing I've said to them is ... oh God, I forgot what I was going to say. I don't ... my main points have been just get work experience and see if you like it. But-

Ryan Hinchey: Okay.

“Student 7”: Also, just determine if you're a people person or if you prefer doing a desk job, or if you prefer kind of working on the field, or if you prefer manual labour, or actually physically building things, or if you prefer building things on the computer. If you determine if you're a people person or not and things like that, if you kind of determine who you are and where you kind of work best, I feel like that can also help you narrow it down.

Ryan Hinchey: Definitely. That's great. Those are all the questions that I have for you. Is there anything else that you feel like we didn't cover, that you sort of wanted to add to this? Or do you feel like you expressed yourself in terms of course selection?

“Student 7”: I've probably expressed myself I think, sorry.
Interview 8

Interviewer: Ryan Hinchey
Student: “Student 8”

Ryan Hinchey: Okay so we are recording. Hello, can you please state your name for the record?

“Student 8”: “Student 8”.

Ryan Hinchey: And you’re currently a senior at “SCHOOL XYZ”? 

“Student 8”: Yes.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay, please state your citizenship.

“Student 8”: I am, I have three citizenship’s, Argentina, the United States and the United Kingdom.

Ryan Hinchey: Very cool and how long have you been at “SCHOOL XYZ”? 

“Student 8”: I’ve been at “SCHOOL XYZ” since the third grade.

Ryan Hinchey: Just to make you aware once again, this is for my doctoral dissertation at Northeastern. The topic of the presentation is students’ course choices and how they make sense of their selecting courses at “SCHOOL XYZ”. Today we’re just going to go over a few things. I previously had you do the mind map. We’ll start talking about that and then go on through just some more questions that I have for you.

This session is being recorded. You’ll have access to both the transcription and recording afterwards if you want them. They’ll be stored for a period of time afterwards and then destroyed. All names and everything will be kept confidential so there’s nothing you need to worry about. Your name will not be tied to anything. Nobody will see it except for me and my advisor so hopefully you should feel comfortable about saying anything that you want. It’s no reflection of you as a student at “SCHOOL XYZ”, but just purely for the purposes of this dissertation. Any questions so far?

“Student 8”: No.
Ryan Hinchey: You can stop if you feel uncomfortable at any time. If there are questions that you have during this interview please let me know and we'll proceed accordingly. If you don't have any questions right now we'll move into the mind map and you have your copy in front of you.

“Student 8”: Yes.

Ryan Hinchey: Looking at your mind map with your name in the middle and the factors that influenced your course selection around your name, is there one of them, we will be talking about all of these, but is there one of the factors that you’d like to start with?

“Student 8”: Probably conversations with my parents because it's the most sort of important one I think.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay so we'll start there and then we'll sort of work our way around clockwise from there if you want. So tell me, why conversations with your parents, how that happened, why is this an important factor for you?

“Student 8”: Okay, so my parents have always been extremely involved in my education. My Mom even since middle school was always very aware and very involved in what courses we were choosing, just because she always made an effort to talk to parents of older children and what they learned and what they went through. Especially at “SCHOOL XYZ” there’s a lot of sort of things. There’s not a very clear set out of if you pick this course, where is it going to take you, like to the point where she even worked with Simon Wright which is the academic ... I don't know.

Ryan Hinchey: Principal.

“Student 8”: Yeah, dean or something like that. She created the mind map for course selections for math, for the math path from middle school to high school essentially and where you would get to depending on which courses you chose. She was always very aware. Even from fifth grade I remember her saying, "Make sure you work hard now because then you'll be able to go on to advanced math and then you'll be able to get on the math if you end up deciding that you would want to go to engineering," because for me as a child I never knew. I've never really been like I really want to be a vet, or I really want to be a doctor.

I've always been sort of good at several subjects so my Mom never wants me to feel restricted when I got to the point of actually deciding so she would always be very aware from middle school. Then I think that has translated to high school. Again maybe for my sister a bit more about choosing specific subjects for her career, but for me choosing subjects that would allow me to
explore almost anything in university because I really have no idea what I want to do.

Then I think also conversations with my parents ties into what society wants or family values and stuff like that because my parents, well my Dad is a lawyer and my Mom was a computer ... She studied computer science and finance so they're both very, they're both quite intellectual and academic people. I think it did kind of veer me into the sort of sciences and mathematics and humanities area as opposed to theatre and the arts. I do think that although they've always been like you can take whatever classes that you want, there is some things that my parents were like you need to do this.

I don't think it's like this anymore, but when I was in freshman year freshman were not allowed to take biology in freshman year. So that would mean you had to take three sciences in 10th grade which is crazy, a workload. My Mom literally fought with the school to say like can you at least give ... Every other high school in America lets 9th graders take biology. It's ridiculous that we can't take it and so from that year on they started. We had to take an entrance exam at that point to get into the biology course for 9th grade which we were technically weren't supposed to be allowed to take.

I don't know, just things like that. They've been very involved and yeah, even from that point you can see my parents kind of were veering me to the science, an edge. I remember in 10th grade for example my Mom because of all the articles and things out there about jobs being like how there are so many jobs available for people who can code, my Mom was like, "So maybe you should really think about Java Programming as one of your electives." That year I didn't have any art classes and I took the full eight classes. I had no study halls. My elective was Java Programming.

Although I didn't enjoy it that much and think I wouldn't have chosen it if I could go back again; I'm glad I did it, but you can kind of see how they did influence my decisions.

Ryan Hinchey: When you were deciding, when you were in 10th grade and deciding whether or not you wanted to do the IB or the AP, did you have conversations with your parents about that as well?

“Student 8”: Yes, so my parents again ... Well I think that they were less sort of involved because they didn't really know which one to pick. They took me to all the meetings and all the talks and we talked with all the teachers about all the benefits and tradebacks, but they didn't make me pick one or the other. It was more my choice, but I do think they came to the conclusion that I'm not the best under pressure and under time constraints and multiple choice so
we ended up leaning toward IB, but that was mainly because of my, the way that I learn.

**Ryan Hinchey:** How did these conversations happen? Did they usually just happen naturally or did you have them over the dinner table, or sort of was there a time set down that you met with your parents to talk about these?

"**Student 8**:" Yeah, so usually there would be kind of an email sent out to all the parents being like you're kids need to start picking their classes. Here's the course selection booklet. Then over the next couple of weeks maybe over dinner my Mom would be like, "Okay you guys need to start figuring out which classes you're going to pick." We would just go through the book course by course trying to figure it out.

**Ryan Hinchey:** Just to be clear that email was sent out from the school?

"**Student 8**:" I think so if I remember correctly, yeah.

**Ryan Hinchey:** The course selection handbook was sent out from the school as well?

"**Student 8**:" Yeah, and I think they made it an online PDF everyone could access.

**Ryan Hinchey:** Okay and you said that you have one sister, correct?

"**Student 8**:" Yes, I have one sister.

**Ryan Hinchey:** She's younger than you.

"**Student 8**:" She's in two grades below me, but a year and one-half younger.

**Ryan Hinchey:** Okay, and so you are the first one in your family to be going through this whole process.

"**Student 8**:" Yes.

**Ryan Hinchey:** Good, so do you feel like your parents were more involved because they are unfamiliar with the process with you?

"**Student 8**:" Yeah, I think they were very involved with me and also my mother because she's from Argentina and she grew up in Venezuela so they had a completely different system. She was very involved so she could try to learn about it and figure it out. My Dad on the other hand, I mean he works every day but he went through the American school system and he went to college and to graduate school so he knows a lot about it. I think because of what he knew and because my Mom's interest in education, that's kind of like they've been just very involved in their life.
You decided to do the IB programme. What were your three highers?

I have four highers.

Okay.

I did Spanish high level as my fourth because I speak fluent Spanish. I did Spanish a year. Well I started IB Spanish in the 10th grade because you’re allowed to start it at that year, standard level. Then I realised that if I didn’t do higher level I would have a whole year without doing Spanish and I was already losing it so I didn’t want to lose my Spanish.

I also did Economics high level, Language & Literature higher level, and biology high level, but the kind of interesting thing is I mean you know how we kind of choose our highers in the last year, so I originally started off out in math higher level and I did it for a whole year until ... Yeah and I did the final exam right before my senior year and then decided that I was going to drop down to standard level and swap up Language & Literature as my fourth instead of math just because I mean I was predicted a four, but I knew a boy who had lower grades across the board, so I thought it was a mistake.

I talked to him and he said yeah it was a mistake. You were meant to get a five on your transcript. He was like, "And if you got tutoring you could get it up to a six," but I just knew that I didn’t have time for tutoring with all the college applications. I also knew that I wasn’t going to apply for engineering in the UK, so I decided to swap it.

Then what was your other standard level other than math?

Chemistry and what was my other one?

That should be it because if you did four and two.

Yeah, chemistry and math, yeah.

Going back to the conversations with your parents, did you have conversations with them about doing four highers which is not the norm?

Yeah, so my Mom was the one who wanted me to do math higher level just because she was like, "If you do want to do engineering you have more access." My parents really didn’t, like they didn’t have an opinion whether me doing four highers or not. That was kind of my decision just because I knew I wanted to do Econ, Bio, and then either math or Eng/Lit, but Spanish was always something I wanted to do on the side. My parents didn’t really make me do it.
My parents actually kind of wanted me to take French because I mean it does look ... It doesn't look that great on your college application that you're taking your own language as an IB, but for me as a student who never lived in a Latin American country, I've never really learned how to read or write in Spanish although I can speak it perfectly, so it was for me more than for anyone else.

I mean, the other classes yeah, so chemistry and biology my parents they did agree more with sciences. My Mom also and my family are very interested in economics. For example, my parents would have never agreed with me taking environmental systems in society. They would have never really agreed with me taking math studies. I mean geo and psychology maybe, but I've always been very interested in economics as well. I think just from knowing me they knew that I would like those courses. If you looked at my sister's they would be completely different.

Ryan Hinchey: Yeah, that's good. Okay moving onto the next circle you talk about the conversations with your teachers.

"Student 8": Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: Explain that.

"Student 8": They didn't really influence me so much what courses to pick specifically, but more information about where I would go if I picked which courses so back to math all the way back in fifth grade my teacher Miss Kingsley who now left the school was the one who explained to us that if you don't get in advanced math in the sixth grade it sets you up to be in a lower year of math for the rest of your life in high school at "SCHOOL XYZ".

Those conversations with my parents were, with my teachers were helpful. Again also conversations with my teachers was especially useful for AP or IB talks because for example Mr. [Duggin 00:13:08] economics teacher teaches both the AP and IB and so he could really compare the two and figure and kind of tie in with my learning style. It did help with my course selection.

Ryan Hinchey: Have you ever had any teachers that have sort of put you off taking a course because of a previous experience that you've had with them?

"Student 8": I'm trying to think. Chemistry higher level at first I didn't want to take. I hate to be rude but the chemistry teachers at our school suck and I just knew that I wouldn't have the support even though luckily they swapped the teacher that was originally maybe for us for higher; it's still the way they teach it is really bad at this school. What else, Language & Literature, Economics, Spanish. I mean I, something that kind of detracted me from the AP was people did say the English teacher was not very good. Well I mean that he
was good, but it was extremely difficult and a lot of work so that kind of put me off.

Other than that environment for instance I would never take not only because my parents probably wouldn't have let me but the teacher also put me off.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay, the next thing you talk about is your interests, passions, what you enjoy.

“Student 8”: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: How did that factor in on your decision making?

“Student 8”: Yeah, so freshman year I loved biology so much that I was like I need to continue it for me. It never really was a question for me about whether I was going to pick that course. Again Spanish was while it wasn't really for anybody else but for me. I took painting in freshman year. That was because I want, I loved, I always really wanted to do painting. It was always a balance of kind of doing the more practical things like math higher level because I didn’t know if I wanted to do engineering or not at that time, but also balancing between things like biology which is something that I really enjoyed.

Ryan Hinchey: Now for your schedule and the time of the day, you sort of hinted about this before when you talk about taking eight classes. Do you feel like you had enough time in your day to take eight classes?

“Student 8”: No, so if I could I would take so many more classes. I always wanted to try psychology. I really kind of regret it, but know because of the decisions that I had to make I couldn’t have avoided it; taking more art classes. It’s just I’m someone who’s so interested in so many different things that there were just not enough hours in the day. That’s something that also has influenced my decision in universities because I really wanted to go somewhere that had a good design programme if I want to do classes in that in the future as well.

Ryan Hinchey: Good, and that sort of ties into the classes that are available-

“Student 8”: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: -at “SCHOOL XYZ” I’m assuming you’re talking about, so do you feel like there are enough classes available, too many?

“Student 8”: I mean I think I had enough classes available for me. I do think for example maybe in middle school we weren’t studying native Spanish because we’re not allowed to take Spanish. That was frustrating. I don’t think I’ve had a
shortage of classes. I think there are definitely enough, but yeah. I mean it's just I am restricted by the ... I know that there are a million classes that you can obviously take in the IB. I would have been interested in taking things like Italian. They don't have that at school, but again I probably would have stuck with French and Spanish anyway. It wasn't an issue, but it is there.

Ryan Hinchey: Other than Italian, can you think of anything that you wish that the school offered?

“Student 8”: That they don't have?

Ryan Hinchey: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

“Student 8”: I know, I mean the classes that I wish they had are things that don't really exist in high school yet. I wish that they had classes that taught ... Well I mean you can't really teach it but classes where they promote innovative thought, entrepreneurial thinking and more practical skills and also maybe ... The IB kind of does this with things like TOK and [inaudible 00:17:46] that like a place where, but not really because TOK's more philosophical. A class where it's made to integrate different subjects and make them into a disciplinary and how you can apply the different classes that you're taking into maybe your final project or some idea or product that you were going to create.

Something else that I wish was available but this all schools in America, practical things like learning how to do your taxes. There are so many things that I feel like I'm going into in the world that I have no idea about like how to deal with buying your first house, things like that. Your parents know, but I mean what if you have parents you just moved to “SCHOOL XYZ”. They don't speak English and you're going to live here the rest of your life and they don't know about the system, those things that you need to know, so like that.

Ryan Hinchey: Yeah. You will be happy to know that “SCHOOL XYZ” will now be offering Italian.

“Student 8”: Really.

Ryan Hinchey: We do have an Italian teacher lined up for next year.

“Student 8”: Cool.

Ryan Hinchey: Is it fair to say kind of thinking, with hearing what you just said, that almost the IB classes can be considered a bit like a silo effect when you’re in the class doing that class alone and it’s not really integrated with other classes?
“Student 8”: Yeah, I think, I mean like in the textbooks they do have, all of the IB textbooks have little bubbles at the side like TOK link or cross curricular link to different subject, but I never have time to read those bubbles. I read the text I need to know for my exam. It’s not like there’s not an effort. There is an effort. It’s just a time constraint more than anything else.

Ryan Hinchey: Now you sort of talked about the next bubble on what society wants and societal values. Just to go back to that briefly, do you feel pressure as a student who is 18 years old to do certain things? I know that the job market dictates some things, but did you ever feel like okay, I’m a young adult. I need to be doing this. Society is telling me that I should be doing this, but I really want to be doing this, or did you always feel-

“Student 8”: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: How did you feel about that?

“Student 8”: Yeah, I mean for example JAVA Programming, I’m an extremely social person. I’m never, ever in my life going to be sitting in front of a computer for hours. It’s never a job that I’m going to do. I do think society dictated that for me because there are so many people without jobs, but the fact that there are millions of jobs for people who can code is ridiculous. It’s a useful skill, but I know it wasn’t for me so that was something that society dictated that at least I did it. I figured I didn’t want to do it, so I mean it’s good that they pressured me in that way, but if I didn't have that choice and my parents forced me to do things, then I do think that society definitely does pressure.

I also think the fact that I didn't take arts classes or theatre classes, that was dictated by society. I think it's growing less. I know the US universities they look at the whole person. You're not penalised for lacking the arts, but I think it's a societal thing. I don't know if I was just reading that. Maybe I think it's also my family values. They're very rational, scientific, logical thinkers. I don't know I was never ... My parents never did classes like the creative ones so I was dictated by that but it's not like anyone's fault. It's just there.

Ryan Hinchey: Yes, now you have an interest in engineering.

“Student 8”: Yeah, maybe.

Ryan Hinchey: You have mentioned possibly you might study that at the university level. Did you ever feel that as a young woman who is interested in engineering, did you ever feel any society pressure there?

“Student 8”: No, I think that's something our school does a really good job at. I did talk to my math teacher recently and apparently there are no girls in math higher level this year which is very weird, but having grown up in third grade
through “SCHOOL XYZ” I remember in third grade we had a class called People Skills where you had to learn literally how to deal with people and how to be around people. I came from a British school system so we were always very put down for individual thinking and speaking when we weren’t meant to speak and things. That’s why I moved to “SCHOOL XYZ” and I’ve always been made to feel that I was important so I don't think I ever felt limited at all.

Ryan Hinchey: That’s great. Finding the balance between work and relaxing, something that you’ll probably deal with for the rest of your life too. Tell me about that. How did that factor in on your decision-making?

“Student 8”: I don't think I was very successful in that [inaudible 00:22:41] bubble. I think the courses that I selected did get me to where I wanted to go, or almost where I wanted to go, but I don’t think they helped me in the relaxing part. Things like taking AP Euro in tenth grade, I did always love history. I don't anymore thanks to AP Euro. I just, senior year I don't think I've gone to bed before twelve at all any single night.

It just, but also I am taking four high levels. Spanish doesn’t really count as a high level for me. It feels like I’m taking standard, but I know there are a lot of people who don’t take the full IB. There are a lot of people who take a couple IBs and some standard level. I know I could have made my life easier. Again that’s like a societal pressure. I would have been looked down upon if I hadn’t done the full IB. I don’t think I was successful in that. For me work was probably more of a parody.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay and so you had mentioned you took AP Euro in 10th grade.

“Student 8”: Yes.

Ryan Hinchey: That was kind of your introduction into AP. Did that help dictate not taking AP in 11th grade?

“Student 8”: Yeah, I think so. I didn’t like ... It showed you how fast-paced it was and when you talked to upperclassmen they were like, "AP Euro is not the most difficult AP and the fact that I know I was probably not mature enough at that point to be evaluating how I would be doing in those AP classes because I was a 10th grader, but yeah it did dictate. I didn’t do badly. I got a four, but I knew that I was capable of getting a five and I didn't and it was just I don't deal well with pressure.

Ryan Hinchey: You also took IB Spanish standard level in 10th grade.
“Student 8”:

Level yeah, but to honest that was easier than like French for me at that point. It wasn’t, I don’t know. It looks hard that I’m taking four, but I was ... I did it. It’s not that hard.

Ryan Hinchey: In 10th grade when you had one IB class and one AP class, do you think that was a good introduction to both?

“Student 8”:

Ryan Hinchey: Is that something you might recommend to other people that if you can take it?

“Student 8”:

The IB Spanish was interesting because I really saw how IB, yeah you were learning Spanish but you were learning how to speak Spanish about important global topics of significance to everyone like global warming and HIV Aids and things like that. I also, I was in AP Spanish for three weeks and then I dropped out of it in the 11th grade. Wait, was it 11th grade? No, tenth grade. I was in AP Spanish for three weeks and then I dropped out of it because there were only three people in my class and I was the only one who talked.

I just didn't, I didn't find it interesting. It was boring. It was a lot more effort so I did kind of cut down my course load with that, but yeah I don't know. I had something to say but I forgot what it was.

Ryan Hinchey: That’s okay. Well if you think of it we can move back, but for now we'll go onto the next bubble which is the goal of getting into a good university. Where, I’m assuming you’ve decided where you’re going to go next year.

“Student 8”:

Ryan Hinchey: Where is that?

“Student 8”:

Ryan Hinchey: Congratulations.

“Student 8”:

Ryan Hinchey: Thank you.
Ryan Hinchey: When you were making your course selection in high school, was university always sort of an end goal for you?

"Student 8": Yes, so I mean I don't think in 9th grade and 10th grade I didn't really know that that's what I was working for until I got done in 10th grade and they were like okay, yeah, this is happening. You're going to college in two years, but I mean it was always there and I always had this sort of like, and I didn't write this down I realise, but I've had always an intrinsic drive. Oh yeah, goal challenging was an intrinsic drive to do well just for myself. That played a role in it and being ambitious, but yeah. I think my course selection I was always like okay maybe if I pick the hardest classes, make contacts with my school, I'll get into a really good university. It worked out for me but yeah, it did play a role.

Ryan Hinchey: When you were talking to the universities, when you were going through that whole process, did they talk about course selection at all and the importance of it?

"Student 8": Yeah, so they would always say, "Pick the hardest. Try to pick the most challenging courses for you, but don't challenge yourself so much that you can't relax and do anything outside of school." They did [inaudible 00:27:58] that. It was very unspecific and I was frustrated by that. I would ask because I know for the UK because I was thinking about applying to the UK at first, it was very specific so that's why for example I started out at my higher level because I was like what if I want to apply to design engineering in Imperial. I need this class. That did dictate my class.

Then when I realised I was going to the US because it's so sort of free in choice then I didn't really think about it anymore. In my senior year I actually really was happy with my course selection because I chose the classes for a higher level and standard level that I wanted to take, not that anybody else or that a university dictated me to take. Whereas I think 11th and 10th grade I was more focused on picking things to make my life difficult or because my parents wanted me to take it, or because I needed it for a university that I might want to go to.

Ryan Hinchey: Good, now do you know if your university accepts any of your IB credits or AP credits?

"Student 8": Unfortunately very few of them and also to add I got sevens in them and unfortunately for me because I really had such a struggle in deciding which universities I was going to and ironically it didn't end up either of the ones I did these trips for. Two weeks before my final exams I went to the US to go do the overnights for my universities, and I wasn't able to study very hard for my exams so I don't think I will be getting those credits, but that's okay.
Ryan Hinchey: That's okay, you got in.

“Student 8”: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: Then you talked about the goal of challenging yourself and I think that kind of is clear in a lot of what we've already talked about today.

“Student 8”: Yeah. I don’t know. I’ve always been a very sort of an ambitious kid and I think that started. I remember this day really clearly that I was in fifth grade and we got one of our first essays and we got a rubric. It was like the first time I saw a rubric and I was like, "Okay so Dad if I do all of these things," because he would always, he always writes and reads essays. "If I do all of these things I can get a B." Then my parents looked at me and they were like, "Lucia why are you aiming for the B when you could be aiming for the A?" From that day on I don’t know why I ever thought. I think everyone’s like C is average. B is good, but then from that point on my parents kind of showed me why would you ... You can be aiming for an A. It is possible, you just have to work a bit harder.

Ryan Hinchey: Yeah, good. Is there anything else that you've maybe you forgot off the mind map that you want talk about now or do you think we've covered it?

“Student 8”: I think we’ve covered it.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay, now if you since you have a younger sister, this is pretty applicable to you but think about your younger sister and students maybe in 7th, 8th, 9th grade. If you had to give them a piece of advice about course selection in high school what would you tell them to do or not to do?

“Student 8”: I’d say first of all be proactive because I think a lot of people ... I’ve talked to so many friends who don't have parents as involved as mine, who have no idea what’s going on and how their decisions will affect their future, so definitely be knowledgeable and also I think that's kind of a thing with the school. It is difficult to read a 50 page course selection booklet. I don't think it's very accessible. I don't know what a better way to do it would be, but making it very apparent and the fact that it’s sent to parents as well. I know so many parents who literally are not involved at all so also sending it to kids. Obviously kids aren’t involved sometimes too but making it theirs so they have no reason not to check it.

The other thing I would say is pick classes that you like. Pick your classes for you and universities, but make sure you have one or two classes that you find or thought are interesting because you’re also going to go crazy. I mean you’re not going to really enjoy yourself and I learned that in my last year of picking classes that I actually did enjoy.
Ryan Hinchey: Now that you are almost done, a few more days, thinking back over the past four years is there anything that you would change at all? I know you talked about JAVA but, I know you talked about codes-

“Student 8”: I’m glad I took it, yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: -and good things that came off of that, but is there anything that you looking back are you unhappy with or you wish you had this opportunity and you didn’t take it?

“Student 8”: I honestly, I don’t regret any of the decisions that I made. I think in the time of 10th grade and 9th grade, I was sad that all of my friends had all of these study halls, and I didn’t and I wasn’t maybe socialising as much during those class periods. I don’t regret that because I ended up discovering a lot about myself and what I liked, what I didn’t like and challenging myself and taking a lot of interesting classes so I think overall I’m happy.

I think I would if I could make sure to spend more time sleeping. Spend more time sleeping and spend more time outside of school, maybe like not on your phone, not on your computer, and just I don’t know, walk outside and go for a run.

Ryan Hinchey: Taking care of yourself.

“Student 8”: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: Yeah. That’s good. Those are all the questions that I have for you today. Is there anything that you sort of feel like we missed talking about?

“Student 8”: I don’t think so.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay, so just want to thank you for your participation.

“Student 8”: Thank you.

Ryan Hinchey: I will stop the recording at this time.

Interview 9
Interviewer: Ryan Hinchey
Student: “Student 9”
Ryan Hinchey: That's great. Okay. Hello. Could you just state your name for the record?

“Student 9”: “Student 9”.

Ryan Hinchey: And you're currently at a senior at “SCHOOL XYZ”?

“Student 9”: Yes.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Could you please state your citizenship?

“Student 9”: I'm a dual citizen of the US and Britain.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. And how many years have you been at “SCHOOL XYZ”?  

“Student 9”: This is my fifth year.

Ryan Hinchey: And you were in the US before that?

“Student 9”: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. So, just to make you aware, once again, this is for my doctoral dissertation at Northeastern University. The topic of the presentation is student’s course choices and how they make sense of their selecting courses at “SCHOOL XYZ”. Today we're going to go over a few things. I previously had you do the mind map, and so we'll start talking about that, and then go on to some more questions that I have for you. This session is being recorded. You will have access to both the transcription and the recording afterwards if you want them. It will be stored for a period of time afterwards, and then destroyed. All names and everything will be held confidential, so there's nothing that you need to worry about. Your name will not be tied to anything. Nobody will see it except me and my advisor. Hopefully you should feel free to say anything you want. This is no reflection of you as a student at “SCHOOL XYZ”, but just purely for the purposes of this dissertation. Any questions so far?

“Student 9”: No.

Ryan Hinchey: You do have the right to stop if you feel uncomfortable at any time. If there are any questions that you have during this, let me know and we'll proceed accordingly. If you don't have any questions, then we'll move right into the mind map, and do you have your copy in front of you?

“Student 9”: Yes.
Ryan Hinchey: Okay, so looking at your mind map with your name in the middle, is there one of the factors that you want to start talking about? Is there something that you feel that is probably more pressing than the others?

“Student 9”: Sure. So, my father works in the finance, so he was pretty keen on me to at least get a background on economics, so the last two years I was on AP Micro and AP Macro, and, without him pushing me, I may not have taken those classes, but, he was really insistent that I actually do those classes because he believes in today’s world you really need a background in economics to really make it anywhere. So, that’s why I chose those two classes last years.

Ryan Hinchey: So, did you do Micro in 11th grade, and then Macro in 12th grade?

“Student 9”: Yes.

Ryan Hinchey: Is that sort of the natural progression of the two courses?

“Student 9”: Yeah. Usually it’s done in one year, but at “SCHOOL XYZ” they do it in two separate years.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. So when you were picking your Micro course for grade 11 then, did you sit down with your parents and talk about this? How did the conversation go with your parents, that they have … Kind of your dad informed you that you should be taking that?

“Student 9”: Well, I had an older brother who previously took the course as well and he recommended it, but it was mostly my dad’s influence that made me choose the class.

Ryan Hinchey: Was it a formal conversation, or was it just kind of … ?

“Student 9”: It was a formal conversation. I had my share in it, but in the end I agreed with him.

Ryan Hinchey: Is that something that you guys did quite a lot, talk about course selection, or was it once a year that you sort of had a talk about it? How did that come about?

“Student 9”: Not too much. Mainly my parents helped me choose my courses going into 10th grade, and going into 11th grade. I chose my courses going into senior year because I thought I knew what was best, trying to get the best grades for myself, and these topics I thought I’d do the best in.

Ryan Hinchey: So you have decided to pursue the AP programme then?

“Student 9”: Yes.
Ryan Hinchey: When you were having conversations with your parents, did you ever talk about the difference about AP and IB, or just doing regular high school courses?

“Student 9”: Yes. I was considering doing the IB, however, I don’t speak a language, and I thought that would be quite troubling since I’ve never really done well in the area. So, since I was going to the states, it’d be better for me just to be AP.

Ryan Hinchey: So, when you finish “SCHOOL XYZ”, how many APs are you finishing with?

“Student 9”: I’m finishing with eight AP classes.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Did your parents have any influence on any of the other classes that you took other than the Micro or Macro?

“Student 9”: Yes. AP Lang, Language and Compositions, another one they were ... We were battling on whether I should take it or not, in a way.

Ryan Hinchey: So what was the battle? What did you talk about?

“Student 9”: So, that class was very tough to get a good grade in, and, today people would argue that getting a grade in a lesser class is more important than struggling in class, learning more, but getting a worse grade.

Ryan Hinchey: And so, ultimately, who won the battle?

“Student 9”: I won the battle in a way, kind of, because I wanted to take the class, because I thought it would make me better as a writer because I love to write, however, it wasn’t the type of writing I like to do. Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: You had mentioned your brother had attended “SCHOOL XYZ” as well. Did he do some of the same courses that you've done?

“Student 9”: He did. He's done quite a few of the same courses I've done actually, besides a few. I know he took AP Lang and AP Micro, but he chose not to do AP Macro. And, I chose to do AP Biology this year, however, he was never very good at science, so he did not elect to do that.

Ryan Hinchey: Did you have conversations with him when you were choosing courses?

“Student 9”: Yeah. So, he pretty much gave me the rundown saying what teachers are nice, which ones are easy graders, that sort of thing. He just told me which class I’ll learn the most in.
Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Moving on to the next circle that you have, you talked about grades and you kind of hinted about that before, about some classes are easier to get better grades in than others. Is that what you had in mind for that circle, or is there other things you want to talk about with grades?

“Student 9”: No, that’s pretty much exactly what I was talking about because for example I started taking AP Lang, and it was very rigorous course. I struggled. Although, it did make me a better writer, but this year I chose to do English 12, which helped my grade quite a bit.

Ryan Hinchey: Do you feel like the grades that you got from your younger years, from grades 9 and 10, helped dictate what you were going to take in grades 11 and 12, or, did you see that you were getting good grades in one subject and wanted to pursue that?

“Student 9”: Yeah, I think that corresponded to the next couple of years because I took pretty well to history when I was in freshman year, and then I chose to do AP Euro and I did quite well in that, so I chose to do AP US the next year. Math, on the other hand, I wasn’t very good at math, so, I wasn’t going into the top math classes that I could have been doing.

Ryan Hinchey: Are there some classes that you got a bad grade in, possibly in 9th and 10th grade, but still then took a class in 11th and 12th grade because you felt you had to, or, for some other reason?

“Student 9”: Yeah, actually math was one of those. So, I struggled, not mainly 9th grade and 10th grade, towards the end of the year I was struggling probably because I wasn’t putting in the amount of effort I should have, but I still elected to do the courses later in 11th and 12th grade.

Ryan Hinchey: Why did you choose to do that?

“Student 9”: Preparation for college, trying to get college credits.

Ryan Hinchey: Did anyone at “SCHOOL XYZ” help you choose courses along the way, and look at your grades?

“Student 9”: Yes. Some of my teachers looked at my grades and helped me choose a class for the next year. So, my math teacher, for example, saw I was struggling a little bit in pre-calculus, so she said to take on AP Stats and not AP Calculus.

Ryan Hinchey: How were you made aware of what courses were available to you?

“Student 9”: There was a course fair in the gym that I attended, and I went and talked to a few of the teachers, but also I heard about it mainly from past students, teachers and just going on PowerSchool, trying to figure out what I should do.
Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Going on to the next one, you talk about college, so, where are you headed off to college next year?

“Student 9”: I’m gonna be attending Penn State University.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay, great. And do you have any idea what you’ll be studying when you get there, or are you just going in undecided?

“Student 9”: Right now I’m going in as an international politics major, but I think I might try to switch to business finance.

Ryan Hinchey: And so, when you were picking your classes, how did college come into play?

“Student 9”: I knew I had to impress the admissions office by taking AP classes and doing well in them. It’s not just picking a hard class and then getting a mediocre grade. You have to show that you can thrive in a college course.

Ryan Hinchey: How did you know that? Who told you that you needed to do well in courses?

“Student 9”: My college counsellor told me. My other teachers told me that.

Ryan Hinchey: Did you speak to university representatives when you were going through high school, that sort of informed you about classes you should be taking or not taking, or grades that you should be getting?

“Student 9”: Yeah, so, I saw quite a few colleges who came to visit the school and they pretty much told us what they wanted to see in their students. So, I took that on board and try to apply that to my schedule.

Ryan Hinchey: Was the goal always to study in the United States, or were you looking elsewhere?

“Student 9”: No, the goal was always to study in the United States.

Ryan Hinchey: With that in mind, did you know that you needed pretty good grades to get into the United States, and ... ?

“Student 9”: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Did the universities ever tell you to take one versus the other, IB or AP, or, ... ?

“Student 9”: No school’s ever shown influence or preference toward them.
Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Do you know if you’ll be receiving any credit for your AP classes that you’ve taken?

“Student 9”: I’m not sure. It depends on how my grades come in this year.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Did that influence you at all when you were looking at universities about credits or anything like that?

“Student 9”: Not so much, no.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. I know you’re not at university yet, but talking to your brother who’s gone on to university, do you feel that the AP programme is good preparation for your college years?

“Student 9”: Yeah I do because your teachers can help you a lot, but, it’s mainly just you having to put the time in, take time to study every night, and I feel like that’s what a lot of colleges ... Because I’m gonna be attending quite a large university where professors can’t just get to every kid, answer every question, so I’m gonna have to really apply myself to my studies, by myself.

Ryan Hinchey: Did you ever think of taking an IB course, or was it always just an AP?

“Student 9”: I never really considered taking IB courses. I was always on the path to taking AP.

Ryan Hinchey: Moving on to your next bubble, you talk about reading. So, how did reading influence your decision for your courses?

“Student 9”: I’ve always loved to read literature, and just mainly any reading, and, that’s why I think I chose to take on two AP history courses because I just had a love for reading. I knew it wouldn’t be so much studying as like learning new things, and yet, I approached it like reading a story instead of just studying for an exam, or studying for a test, or being ready for an essay.

Ryan Hinchey: So you talk about having two history courses in the AP programme. Was there any problem taking multiple courses in what you wanted to take, or was there flexibility? Did you feel that there was flexibility within the programme?

“Student 9”: Oh yeah, there was definitely flexibility.

Ryan Hinchey: So, you never had a problem choosing courses within the AP programme that you wanted to take, or ... ?

“Student 9”: No. It was generally pretty efficient.
Ryan Hinchey:  Okay. Do you remember anything specifically within your reading that kind of prompted you to take a specific class, or was it just in general that you liked reading and you liked the liberal studies part of it?

“Student 9”:  Yeah. It was mostly just my uncle really got me into reading Stephan King novels, Dan Brown and I just found a passion for it. That’s where I really started.

Ryan Hinchey:  Going back to sort of talking about your university, and planning on starting out in international politics, and then maybe moving into business or finance. Have you done work at the high school level, that has sort of inspired you to look into those fields, or, why are you thinking those fields right now?

“Student 9”:  I should have applied myself more in high school. That’s something I regret. Not joining Model UN, and, it’s mainly because I was very keen into sports the last four years, and the times would clash, and I probably should have made sacrifices from sports to join clubs such as Model UN or taking part in student council, and I hope to do stuff like that in college.

Ryan Hinchey:  Okay. So you think that if you had done Model UN you might know a little more about international politics, but, because of that reason you’re kind of keeping your mind open to the business world as well?

“Student 9”:  Exactly.

Ryan Hinchey:  Okay. So, at “SCHOOL XYZ”, you’ve done two History courses, you’ve done Micro and Macro, so that’s sort of leading you towards either of those politics or business courses. Are there any other AP classes that you’ve taken that have sort of said okay, maybe this is something I want to study at university, or that’s something that I definitely don’t want to study at university?

“Student 9”:  This year I took AP Biology, and, although I did quite well at the start because I was really devoting myself to my studies, I fell off a little bit in later weeks, and, it just became a bit tiring studying for all of those ... I just found that I didn’t have an interest for the sciences.

Ryan Hinchey:  Okay. And your final bubble, you talk about teachers and that being sort of a two-way conversation, so, thinking back over the four years you’ve been here in high school, how have the teachers influenced your decisions from individual classes to the whole curriculum that you’re studying?

“Student 9”:  If I was going to do a two year course, or do the same subject two years in a row such as history or economics or math, I always thought of what I thought of the teacher. For example, I had a teacher for AP Euro, Mr. Powell, who I’ve
found is a great teacher, really inspired me to learn more about history, and, that’s one of the key factors of why I chose to do AP US.

Ryan Hinchey: And then, have there been any teachers that have sort of turned you off from taking a class?

“Student 9”: Yeah, so, my English teacher last year, although very, very good teacher, a bit strict. He did make me a much better writer, and, my thought process and my approach to writing was a lot better when I entered his class. I just did not want to take on AP Literature in my senior year because of his teaching.

Ryan Hinchey: Has there ever been a time that you felt like you needed to choose between two courses? Like you were stuck between this one or that one? If so, how did you go about making that ultimate decision of what you were going to be studying?

“Student 9”: An example, that would be this year. I was trying to decide between AP Calculus and AP Statistics, and, although I love to do math, such as I like to do algebra, I knew I just wouldn’t have the time to put in ... Although, AP stats is a tough course, it wasn’t as tough, the teacher said, as AP Calc. So, I knew since I was doing sports, and all these extra curricular activities, I knew I wouldn’t have the time to really get a good grade in AP Calculus.

Ryan Hinchey: So, you talk about time, do you feel like within the AP programme there’s enough time in the day for all the classes that you need to take, and, sort of the work that you do externally as well or do you think that you could fit more in the day or less in the day or how do you feel like your day is structured?

“Student 9”: During my junior year, I found it tough to balance my schedule doing three varsity sports, plus doing the [inaudible 00:18:01] project, trying to balance that with three AP courses. I did find it tough, and it hurt me a little bit, but this year I found that balance. I thought my junior year was a good indicator of what I should be doing, and, it did help me balance a lot.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay, good. Now, do you find that your friends are supportive of you in the courses that you’re taking, or, have they ever said anything about some things that you’ve taken that they disagree with, or, have they factored into this whole decision making process at all?

“Student 9”: My friends, not so much. There is a bit of a debate on which is tougher, the IB or the AP, and, some argue IB. I argue that the AP is actually a little harder because it’s more self taught. But no, I’ve never really been influenced on what my friends think of the courses I take.
Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Going back to that argument there, you know, taking AP courses, how do you feel that they're self taught? Do you feel like you need to do a lot of work outside of the classroom?

“Student 9”: Definitely. The teachers can only teach you so much in the class time that we get that you have to get into deeper detail on to the subjects you're studying.

Ryan Hinchey: How much time would you say in a given week do you spend outside of school doing school work? Either homework or studying?

“Student 9”: Probably around six hours maybe.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay.

“Student 9”: Six hours on a heavy week where I have a lot of tests, or homework's due or assignments. Six hours is probably an average.

Ryan Hinchey: Do you feel that IB students do the same, or more or less, or is it just different?

“Student 9”: I couldn’t really gauge what they're doing. I mean, their work is probably more written. Mine is more reading, and just studying and taking in what I've read.

Ryan Hinchey: That's fine. You said that you have a younger brother who's in 9th grade right now. Thinking about him in 9th grade and thinking about even younger students in 7th, 8th grade, what advice would you give to them about choosing courses?

“Student 9”: My advice ... I would tell him not to push himself to far, know his limits, because although pushing yourself is how you become smarter, and how you prepare yourself for college, it can hurt you in ways such as you may not be ready. Some people mature slower than others, and, if you just do the courses you do, you'll get into the college that's right for you, and, you're not just throwing yourself out there with the rest of the group.

Ryan Hinchey: Now, thinking about that advice that you just gave a younger student, would you have done anything differently?

“Student 9”: Yes. I probably would have changed a couple of the courses that I took.

Ryan Hinchey: Like what?

“Student 9”: Probably my science courses. I have no knowledge of physics, and I probably should not have taken that class. I would definitely change that.
Ryan Hinchey: And then in terms of your work load, work-life balance, you had said that junior year was a tough year in terms of that. Do you think that you pushed yourself too much that year, or do you think that in the end it was worth it?

“Student 9”: I think I chose my classes correctly, I just don't think I applied myself the right amount. It hurt me this year. I didn't exactly get into the university that I dreamed to be going to, but it was a lesson that I learned, so now, later in life, I know what it takes to get what you want.

Ryan Hinchey: Yeah. Do you think the school could have done anything to help you come to that realisation earlier? To help you sort of buckle down and be a more serious student, or is that just something that you needed to come to terms with?

“Student 9”: It's more of a responsibility of yourself. You're a 16, 17 year old. You're still young, however you're old enough to know that sometimes you have to say no, I can't go out with my friends, I have to miss a practise to study for a big test that will affect your grades and will affect your future.

Ryan Hinchey: You also said that you're a three sport athlete. You yourself have to make an effort to balance sports and academics, but do you think that the school did enough to work together with the athletic facility to sort of make sure that you weren't burnt out, or that you had enough time to do your assignments?

“Student 9”: No, I don't think the school does enough in that regard. So, I do rugby, which is a contact sport, and, after I have a game or a practise, I find it very hard to study after because were just beaten up, and, teachers don't really have a lot of remorse for that. They think you should just get up, do your homework, even though you have late nights playing games until like 6:30 maybe, and you're just physically exhausted. There's not much remorse at all. There was no leeway. When I broke my jaw last year and I was out for three months, I found a real spike in my grades. A very big spike. So, I was getting almost all As because I had so much more free time, and I wasn't tired and I could apply myself.

Ryan Hinchey: When that happened, did you feel like okay, now I need to step back and bring back the amount of time that I spend on athletics and focus more on academics?

“Student 9”: Yeah, it was mostly I knew I couldn't play, so I had to apply myself to something else, and that just happened to be my grades.

Ryan Hinchey: So, that's something you think you're going to take with [inaudible 00:24:32] university studies?
“Student 9”: Definitely because I’m gonna be playing a sport in university as well, and so, it’s gonna be a struggle to find that balance.

Ryan Hinchey: Sort of looking back over the four years, is there anything that you wish you took, or that you wish the school offered, that we don’t offer, that you had the opportunity to take as a course?

“Student 9”: As I said earlier, I regret not doing Model UN. I thought that would have been a great experience. I just wasn’t committed enough to it. I talked to Ms. [inaudible 00:25:08] about it, one of the heads, and I just didn’t get involved. Other than that, I think the school does a pretty good job of making things available that you want to do. It’s just the one thing for me.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Anything other that you sort of look back and you say, now that I’m done, I have one more day of high school left to do, are you completely satisfied with your four years, or, would you go back and change anything?

“Student 9”: Completely satisfied? No. But, I wouldn’t change anything because the lessons I’ve learned are definitely gonna help me in the future. Not working hard enough, not applying myself. I know what it takes now to be top of the line, like, what you need to be to make it against a very competitive world. I would not changed anything, no.

Ryan Hinchey: Good. Well, hopefully this information will help the school in the long term. It will be made available to the school so that they can take the opinion of their students, and, if there are any changes that need to be made to make the student experience even better, then that this is something that they can use. In closing, I just want to say thank you for your candid responses. And then, like I said, it will be made available to you, but, once again, thank you very much.

“Student 9”: All right, thank you.

Interview 10

Interviewer: Ryan Hinchey
Student: “Student 10”

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Hello. Could you please state your name for the record?

“Student 10”: “Student 10”.
Ryan Hinchey: And you're currently a senior at “SCHOOL XYZ”, class of 2017.

“Student 10”: Yes.

Ryan Hinchey: Fantastic. Could you please state your citizenship please?

“Student 10”: I’m Indian.

Ryan Hinchey: Just to remind you, so this is for my doctoral dissertation at Northeastern and the topic of the presentation is Students Course Choices and How They Make Sense of Their Selecting Courses at “SCHOOL XYZ”. Today, we’re just going to go over a few things. [inaudible 00:00:38] previously, how do you do the mind map? Also, we’re start talking about that, and then we can go on to some more questions that I have for you. This session is being recorded. You’ll have access to both the transcription and recording afterwards if you want them. It will be stored for a period of time afterwards and then destroyed. All names will be kept confidential, so there's nothing that you need to worry about. Your name will not be tied to anything. Nobody will see it except for me and my advisor. Hopefully, you should feel free to say anything you want. This is no reflection of you as a student at “SCHOOL XYZ”, but just purely for the purposes of this dissertation. Do you have any questions at this time?

“Student 10”: No.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Just to let you know, you can stop if you feel uncomfortable at any time. If there are any questions that you have during this, let me know and we’ll proceed accordingly. If you don’t have any questions, then we’ll move right into the mind map. And you have your copy in front of you?

“Student 10”: Yes. I do.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. So looking at your mind map with your name in the middle and the template that was provided, you have filled out the circles that influence, the factors that have influenced your course selection while at “SCHOOL XYZ”. I’d like to take some time to talk about each of these, but is there any one that you’d like to begin with? Anything that you feel is maybe the most pressing that you want to start with?

“Student 10”: I was trying to do that earlier, but I found that a lot of them were interlinked, so ...

Ryan Hinchey: That’s fine. Shall we start with just parents because it’s at the top ...
"Student 10": Okay, sure. Sure.

Ryan Hinchey: ...and then we'll work our way clockwise through it. So, tell me what factor your parents have played in your course selection.

"Student 10": So I think when I moved from India to “SCHOOL XYZ”, I moved in the middle of ninth grade, and I think that was the first time that I actually had to select my courses because before that it had all been mandatory courses in India, and for me, it’s a two-way relationship because we had discussions about the subjects that I wanted to do, subjects that I had particular interests in, and I’ve always been quite inclined towards the sciences, and I really enjoy STEM subjects, so I knew that I wanted to pick those.

In terms of electives, I think my parents played a huge role because we didn't have many electives in India, whereas here I was going to be taking three because I wasn't doing a language, and so we had many discussions about what kind of co-curriculars have I done before and what are some new things you're trying on. So for instance, New Media was a course my parents recommended and they said "This is not something you've done before, so maybe you should try to do it," so I think with parents, I’m closest to them, even if I ... like, I share everything with them, and so it's really nice to just have that two-way relationship and have discussions about the subjects that I want to do.

Ryan Hinchey: When you were in India before coming to “SCHOOL XYZ”, what curriculum did you follow there?

"Student 10": I followed the CDSE which is the Central Board of Secondary Education, so it was the CDSE curriculum.

Ryan Hinchey: And so when you came to “SCHOOL XYZ”, were you provided information about what courses were available to you and with that you sat down with your parents or when you were talking with your parents, was it a formal sort of sit down that you had or how did the conversations go? Was it kind of informal or did you sit down around the dinner table?

"Student 10": I think there wasn't really a fixed time that we did this because our transition from India to the UK was pretty quick. It all happened over a month and my dad was here. In fact, my mom was with me in India, so I think it was just when we were having Skype conversations with each other, it would be a subject that would pop up. "Oh, have you thought about your courses yet?" And "Okay, yes, I've been thinking about these four or five courses that I really like," and then they would give their input on it, so it wasn't formal, I wouldn't say. It was very
casual, and it's just something, like there wasn't a set time. It was any time that we felt like it.

Ryan Hinchey: Good. Now, have your parents gone through this before and all with other siblings? Do you have other siblings that have gone through course selection or are you the first to go through it?

"Student 10": I am the first because I am the oldest sibling. I do have a younger brother.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. And were your parents educated in the UK or were they educated in India?

"Student 10": They were educated in India.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. So they went through a different system ...

"Student 10": Yes.

Ryan Hinchey: ... than you're going through right now, so would you say that it's sort of a learning experience for all of you as you were going through it?

"Student 10": I think it was because both my parents, in India we don't pick specific courses, you pick a stream, and so both of them picked the science stream, and I mean, science has always been a part of our family. Everyone in my family that I can think of has done science careers or science has been a major part of their education. So I think of us knew that we wanted to pick science but definitely the electives were completely new because in India we don't stress on co-curricular activities that much.

Ryan Hinchey: Sure. Yeah. Was there ever a course that you wanted to choose at "SCHOOL XYZ" that your parents were not open to?

"Student 10": I think that happened in 11th grade because I wanted to continue doing New Media, but I think that links to the other factor, the next one, scheduling limitations because with the idea being my entire schedule was full, and I wanted to pick New Media, but then we we're sure if we were going to stay here for my university education or go back to India, and because I wanted to do medicine, there was a limitation that I needed IB Physics and because in India you can pick three sciences if you're doing the IB diploma. Here you cannot. And so, it was between New Media and IB Physics and I had to do IB Physics because of that limitation.

Ryan Hinchey: Sure. So, you did the IB, the full IB diploma correct?
Ryan Hinchey: Okay. So when you chose that, how did you go about choosing that? You made that choice between 10th and 11th grade ...

“Student 10”: Right.

Ryan Hinchey: ... so, what kind of made you go down the path of IB and not AP?

“Student 10”: For me it was the simple fact that AP was not recognised in India, and the IB is recognise worldwide and even in India it’s not recognised extensively, but it was the more recognised out of the two, so that made the decision for IB.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. So, going on to the next one, the scheduling limitations. You referenced it when we were talking about the parents.

“Student 10”: Yes.

Ryan Hinchey: So you took six classes within the IB programme, and then your TOK, so other than feeling that you, with your science classes and not being able to take maybe as many as you want, did you feel any limitations other than that or would you have preferred to take other classes and you did or what limitations are you referencing in your mind map?

“Student 10”: Right. So, I did the six IB courses and I also did IB Physics in 11th grade, so all my eight blocks were full for 11th grade.

Ryan Hinchey: So you did seven IB courses?

“Student 10”: Yes, I did seven IB courses on TOK. And so because of that, it’s just ... I could not do New Media with it as a class, and I really wanted to but then again, I appreciate that I couldn’t do another class because I don’t think I would have been able to actually manage the workload because New Media did require a lot of effort and time outside of class, and so I think because of that I couldn’t pick a course that I wanted to do, but at the same time, I think I followed that passion through by just working at the school TV show and things like that.

Ryan Hinchey: So what were your higher and what were your standard courses that you took?

“Student 10”: My higher level courses were IB chemistry, mathematics and biology, and my standard level courses were English Language and Literature, Psychology, German ab initio and IB Physics.
Ryan Hinchey: Great. If you could have fit in another class, you know, if you had the time for it ...

“Student 10”: Yes.

Ryan Hinchey: ... you would have then done New Media if you felt that you could have handled it, but who is sort of telling you, or did anyone tell you other than yourself, that you couldn’t fit something in?

“Student 10”: I think even fitting in IB Physics, the academic dean at our school wasn’t open to it at first, and it took a lot of persuasion from my family to him to convince him that I can do IB Physics as well, so I think he was quite resistant to that. He was resistant either way, whether it be New Media or IB Physics. We eventually persuaded him to let me do IB Physics because I think he was concerned that I’d be compromising my 45 ID points, so we just had to assure him that that wouldn’t happen, and then we also had conversations with my physics teacher at that point to just make sure I was actually capable of doing IB Physics in addition to my diploma.

Ryan Hinchey: [inaudible 00:10:11]. Moving on to the next, you talk about your abilities, the skills you have or your areas of strength, so I guess, you talked about your family in the sciences. How did you come about knowing what skills that you had? When you were making your courses, how did you know what skills were applicable to what courses?

“Student 10”: So I think, in terms of skills for instance, I know that, from a very young age I used to do abacus classes and I knew that I enjoyed problem solving and logic puzzles, and I always enjoyed mathematics. It was one of my favourite classes, and so I knew that I wanted to do mathematics at a higher level and because I knew that I had the ability to do well in mathematics and enjoy it at the same time. I knew that I’d be motivated throughout the subject even if it was at a higher level, and so that helped me pick IB Mathematics, and then again, science is another area that involves a lot of logical reasoning and just making connections, and I’ve been inclined to those kinds of things, and I knew that through, like I did multiple competitions and olympiads when I was at my old school, and through those projects I knew that science was always something I really enjoyed and I did well in, so that’s why I’ve been more inclined toward STEM subjects.

And I think New Media was the new one because I had never done that before, but from 9th and 10th grade both, I think my teacher Mr. Roberts, he was really encouraging of me and he kept on pushing, kept on like even persuading my parents to encourage me to do New
Media, so I think for New Media it was him more, his belief in me more than my belief in myself, but for sciences and mathematics I knew that I enjoyed those classes.

Ryan Hinchey: That’s good. Now you talk about STEM subjects and you may have seen in literature out there that young women are less represented in STEM subjects and young men typically are, did you, and now we’re talking about the factors that have ...

“Student 10”: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: ... influenced you to take a course, but have you ever been influenced not to take a course because you felt disadvantaged or disenfranchised as a young woman to take a STEM subject here at “SCHOOL XYZ”?

“Student 10”: Thankfully, no. I think I’ve always had support in picking STEM subjects and I think that may also be a culture thing because in India regardless, yes, women aren’t encouraged all the time to pursue a career in STEM subjects even if they’ve studied it, but they’re always, regardless of what your gender is, you’re always encouraged to pick science over humanities or something else.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. That’s great. So your next factor that you have close, the mandatory for the high school or the IB diploma. How aware or when were you made aware of the requirements for either the high school diploma or the IB diploma, and when did you sort of start factoring that into your course schedule?

“Student 10”: I think it happened when I was taking the admission into “SCHOOL XYZ” because the booklet that we got at alpha and all the courses in the very last page, it was the mandatory credits that you need for the different subjects to get a high school diploma, and then we had some conversations with Miss Briggs, and we, my parents and I, that is, and she told us, because I’d been doing Sunscript in India, and Sunscript was not offered here and I was joining in the middle of the year, so we especially had a conversation about the language credits that you need, and then we sort of factored in then, okay, as long as I do a language class in the IB which I have to do because of other requirements of the IB diploma, I’d be fine in terms of my high school credits where I didn’t know I’d do a language in 9th or 10th grade, and I was focusing on science.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Did you feel like you had to take anything else before taking the IB just to sort of fulfil any requirements? Do you remember any courses that you had to take?
"Student 10": I think I had to take history, but it was, I was really neutral about it because I had done history in India as well. It was mandatory and so I didn’t really feel anything about it.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. The next factor, you talk your desire to try something different and learn something new, your curiosity, so you had mentioned sort of about the New Media being one of those courses. Have there been other courses that have made you sort of reach out and say, okay, this is something new that I might not get a chance to study again, so I’m going to do it here at “SCHOOL XYZ”?

"Student 10": So I think again in 9th grade, the three electives I had were drawing and drama and New Media and I think drawing I had done before as a child, but again, I was not formally taught it with the separate techniques and things, whereas in the course description that we saw about drawing, it described a lot of different mediums that you’d be using, so not just colour pencils and paper, you’d be using, you know, you do watercolour, acrylic, chalk, everything and so I think that really intrigued me so that’s why I picked drawing. And then, drama … drama, I can’t really remember why I picked it. I just knew I liked the sound of it, and so I did it, and again, for me it was kind of … I think it appealed to me because it was not something that I had been doing too much of before, and so it just appealed to me a lot that I was able to do all of these different creative courses and my friends in India weren’t able to do. So that was really exciting.

Ryan Hinchey: And when you got into the IB programme, obviously your German was new to you as well, so had did you choose German ab initio versus another ab initio class for language?

"Student 10": So I think that two or three ab initio courses that are offered here are Mandarin, Japanese and German ab initio, and that was the course information fair that helped me make that decision because when I went into the course information fair and I was talking to the teachers from the different courses, I remember the German teacher wasn’t actually there, and I think it was the Mandarin teacher, and she said that she personally recommended out of the three to take German and she said it would be easier because she talked to me about what other courses I was planning on taking and what I wanted to focus on, and so I think once we established that this was not going to be a focus area for me and I just kind of wanted it to be a [inaudible 00:17:07] that could give me a break from the other courses that I was doing, she recommended IB German because the writing is the same, whereas in Japanese or Mandarin, you’d be learning new characters and she said that that was a lot more work than German ab initio. And
so I chose German, and also my dad knew a little but of German. He recommended it as well.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. And then your other classes in the IB programme, do you feel like you had enough flexibility with them, in those classes to sort of be curious in those subjects or was it fairly structured that you couldn't really say, within one of the groups, really express your curiosity in the different course selection? Was there enough there to fulfil your curiosity within each group?

“Student 10”: I think, okay, for science and English and Psychology, yeah, I think all of my classes I would say there was a lot, most of the things what we learned were new and interesting and I think that the way that the IB is designed, that you’re not forced, just like spoon-fed information and you actually need to do your own research and think about things. So I think that kept me engaged throughout the two years of the diploma, and I liked the IB for that because it wasn't just book knowledge that you were doing. I mean, we’d spend so many sessions in all of my classes watching YouTube videos about something and then having discussions about it, and especially in English because it was you have the text there but it’s so fluid and I think I really enjoyed that. It was actually one of the things I enjoyed the most, just having these very interesting and long discussions about the characters we were reading about or the settings with the teachers. I really enjoyed that, so I think, yes, there was a lot to keep me engaged and curious.

Ryan Hinchey: Good. Okay. The next we talk about your prerequisites for university course and career aspirations, can you tell me what, before we get into this, where you plan to go to university and what you plan to study?

“Student 10”: I plan to go to university here in the UK, specifically to the University of Edinburgh to study medicine.

Ryan Hinchey: Great. When did you sort of think about your future university plans and how that impacted the courses that you chose and how did that impact them?

“Student 10”: I think we started thinking of where I would go to university at the beginning of 10th grade when we were doing course selections for 10th grade. I knew that, so I think at that point we weren't sure whether I'd be studying in the UK or India because my dad's tenure here was meant to end when 10th grade finished. But I knew that I wanted to do medicine to quite an extent and so with, when I had conversations with Miss Hay, whose my chemistry teacher, she recommended that, and when we look at requirements in India, we
understood that it was important to take all three sciences regardless of where I went, and so that in a way was a prerequisite because I had to do all three sciences in 10th grade, and it carried forward in the IB because then again, at the beginning of the IB diploma, I still did not know where I’d be for university which is why I did IB Physics.

And that turned out pretty well for UK universities as well because UK universities, again for medicine, they required Biology, Chemistry ... sometimes, I don’t think any of them require Physics, but it helps.

Ryan Hinchey: Now when you were sort of looking at universities, how did you know what universities were asking for in terms of their subject requirements and everything?

“Student 10”: So for the UK, I did use a lot of university websites, but another ... there was a document produced by the medical school’s council, yeah, in the UK and it outlines all the requirements for the different universities, so that was quite a handy document to just outline ...

Ryan Hinchey: Okay.

“Student 10”: ... what I needed.

Ryan Hinchey: And do you feel like the courses that were offered at “SCHOOL XYZ” fulfilled all the requirements that UK universities asked for?

“Student 10”: Yes. I think because all of them in the UK recognised the IB, so they fulfil the IB requirements, but I did struggle in terms of the GCSE requirements, because some of the universities are not flexible about GCSEs and so it cut down the number of universities I could apply to. For instance, I remember when I was deciding between Cambridge and Oxford, and I remember going to the Oxford Open Day and asking how did they look at GCSEs and they said, well, if you don’t have GCSEs and we just double your BMAT score which is the entrance test we took, and so where other students were getting an opportunity to show their abilities over a year or more, my grading or qualification to get to the interview would have only depended on that one day that I took an exam, and so that ... I mean, those were times when I felt like okay, maybe 10th grade courses at “SCHOOL XYZ” weren’t the most useful.

Ryan Hinchey: So, looking back at it, do you wish that “SCHOOL XYZ” would have offered GCSEs?

“Student 10”: I think it might have been useful in terms of university requirements, but then again, I don’t think I’ve been at a huge disadvantage by
following the American high school curriculum, so ... because we still use GSCE textbooks, so I know that the syllabus [inaudible 00:23:24] was just that that label of GCSE wasn’t there, so I think yeah, it might have been ... I think, yeah. Might have helped to have that label of GCSE.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. So your next factor you have what other students who have taken the course, so you're talking about other students who have taken the high school course itself.

“Student 10”: Yes.

Ryan Hinchey: So, how did your conversations with them go, you know, once again, were they formal conversations or just in passing and sort of what did you talk about in these conversations with other students who have taken the course?

“Student 10”: So I think these conversations were a little more formal and to the point mostly because I don't know these students and I was just, you know, a teacher may have recommended oh, this is a good person to talk to, and so I'd gone and talked with them, and for instance, at the beginning of 10th grade, we had a course information, a course selection session sort of thing, and I remember talking to someone else who was applying, a senior who had applied to medicine, and he had been through the entrance tests. And so he recommended, he said just take physics in 10th grade and get it done with because you will need it for the entrance tests, so it was more just ... I was never too curious about what the class entailed and whether it was too much work or not. It was mostly just, for the sciences that is, whether it was useful in terms of university applications or medicine, so I think for science most of it has been [inaudible 00:25:10] has been towards this goal of getting into med school.

Ryan Hinchey: Sure, and so you said that your teachers have sort of influenced you in talking to other students ...

“Student 10”: Yes.

Ryan Hinchey: ... have there been other opportunities provided by the school that have allowed you to talk to other students about courses?

“Student 10”: So I think at the course information fair that we had every year, it's good that we also had some students from every class. It's not true for all subjects, but I think for most of the subjects teachers try and have some students who can talk to you and I think that's quite useful. But then again, the way that our high school is organised, it's not that hard
to actually find someone, maybe have a friend who has an older sibling or just go up to a senior or a junior and ask them about the courses that they're doing, so I think there's plenty of opportunities at "SCHOOL XYZ" to do that.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. And were there any clubs or activities that were specifically designed towards medical students at "SCHOOL XYZ"?

“Student 10”: Yes, so we have the medic club at "SCHOOL XYZ" where we have aspiring medics from all grades in high school and it wasn't the most regular club when I was in 9th grade, but it was there and in the few meetings that we did have, they were quite useful because I was able to talk to these students who had been through the same thing that I was going through and they knew much more than maybe and English teacher would. So I think it was quite useful that way.

Ryan Hinchey: Good. And next you have what your friends, so tell me how your friends have influenced you in your courses?

“Student 10”: I think, so friends, I wrote in the factor because we've had conversations about the courses that we do, but I wouldn't say they particularly influenced me to a large extent. Again, it's a two-way relationship. It's more discussions that "Oh, what courses are you taking next year?" And just having like two-way discussions about that. For instance, I think when I was picking my ID courses, I did not know what to pick for the humanities group, and so I was, I think, stuck between history and psychology, so I think I had a few conversations with another one of my friends who's applying, who applied for medicine and a couple of other friends as well, and in general, we were just talking about we don't really want to focus on this area, so which one's the easier course and also something that aligns with our interests, and that's why I picked psychology because it was close to ... it's an interesting subject and it's also quite related to science and it uses a lot of the same skills that are used in science, and so I think with friends it was more just discussions about what do you want to do.

Ryan Hinchey: Sure. Have you ever taken a class because your friends were also taking it?

“Student 10”: No. [inaudible 00:28:16].

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Good. Next we talked about keeping a balance among courses, so with the difficulty, the skills required, the workload and the importance in terms of future aspirations, so do you feel like your
schedule that was with seven courses and all the extras that the IB has, that you were able to keep a balance between these courses?

“Student 10”: I think so. I think that was a factor that I took into account at the end of 10th grade when I was picking my courses because for most of them we didn’t have to pick higher level or standard level at that point, but I already was ... I had already decided which ones I wanted to be higher levels, and once I had my higher levels decided, because they were more important to me, then I could think about, okay, I really enjoy English and I like English literature but with conversations with other students, I know that it’s quite a hard class. It's an intense class, and the workload is quite a lot. And so, I picked English Language and Literature which is a lot more ... it's just lighter. It’s not too heavily based on literature, and you do a plethora of different text types and things that you wouldn’t do in a literature class, so that’s an example of how I wanted to keep a balance.

Again, with the humanities, I knew Psychology was a relatively hard class, but the workload wasn’t too much. With History I knew there would be way too much research. Economics wasn’t particularly something I was inclined towards, again, Business similarly. And so I, again, wanted to keep that balance so I could focus on the courses that mattered to me more than the other ones, and yet enjoy all my courses.

Ryan Hinchey: Good. Now, I think we've talked about this next circle a little bit already, your personal interests in the subject area, but is there anything else that you'd like to add that we haven't really talked about yet with that?

“Student 10”: I don't think so. I think ...

Ryan Hinchey: I mean, I guess we talked about science ...

“Student 10”: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: ... quite a bit, but sort of what has translated that science into medicine now that you’re going to study, because obviously there is a difference between science ...

“Student 10”: Just science and medicine, right.

Ryan Hinchey: ... and medicine.

“Student 10”: I think for me, it's something that I think it's something that my mom told me that she said, she always said the class is only as good as the
teacher, and I found that to be quite true through my experiences. For instance, I knew I enjoyed Biology but my teacher here is amazing and she made me fall in love with Biology and it was after taking her class in 11th grade, I was like yeah, I don’t see myself doing a non-scientific career because I really biology, I mean, you get those teachers sometimes when you just, they’re so passionate about what they do that it’s almost infectious. It just passes on to you. Similarly, I think my maths teachers in 9th and 10th grade, when it came to deciding a maths course, I just went up to her ... this was, a senior recommended, she said if you’re confused just ask your teacher, and I just went up to her and I said "What do I do?"

And she said "I don't see you doing anything other than IB [inaudible 00:31:33] math." I was like "Okay. The decision’s made." So, yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: So, sort of going back to the science to medicine ...

“Student 10”: Yes.

Ryan Hinchey: ... decision, how in your mind do you say okay, I'm a good student in science. Where do you then say I'm not going to study to become a biologist. I’m going to study to become a doctor?

“Student 10”: So I think for that, there were a lot of other factors than just high school courses. A lot of that was after having discussions with my college counsellor. Their suggestion to look into more work experience and actually experience the profession or see what it entails, and I think that helped me make the decision between medicine or some other scientific course at university. For instance, volunteering at a hospice, when I did that, I knew that I enjoy not just the scientific aspect of medicine but the aspect that I get to impact people's life at a personal level, and so I think at that point I could say that yes, this is why I don't want to go into bio-med or neuroscience. I want to study medicine because I want to be a doctor.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. So that confirmed your choices ...

“Student 10”: Yes.

Ryan Hinchey: ... in what your classes ... great. Teachers we talked about a little bit ...

“Student 10”: Right.

Ryan Hinchey: ... but you've talked about how some of your teachers that you have taken have really inspired you. Have you taken some courses because
you know a certain teacher teaches it or have you not taken a course because you know a teacher teaches it?

“Student 10”: I’m trying to think.

Ryan Hinchey: Are these conversations that you have with your friends or something that’s even discussed at all?

“Student 10”: I think yes. That is something that we discuss in general amongst friends, like "Oh, I’ve had this class, and I don’t really like this teacher," or "Oh, no, this teacher’s amazing." I think yes, when I was doing IB Chemistry, I knew I had to take the class and wanted to take the class because it excited me. The teacher did not excite me as much, but then again, I knew that I had to take it, so I took it. So I mean, it wasn’t the best combination, but then I mean, the class [inaudible 00:34:05] so I mean, it was one hour of the day and every time that I felt like it wasn’t going well, I just used to run to my mother or my friends and it was okay. So we got through that year.

Ryan Hinchey: Yeah. And then you talked about the math teacher who encouraged you to take higher level maths. Did the teachers influence, other than that math class, did any other teachers influence you in taking a higher level or a standard level or did you know that you needed to take the sciences at your higher level because of the university placement?

“Student 10”: I think for the sciences, it was already decided by the university prerequisites.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Anything else with the teachers that you want to talk about or do you think that we’ve covered that bubble pretty much?

“Student 10”: I think, yeah. Like I said, past teachers, they affect your course selection for the future, but potential teachers, if you know a teacher is going to be teaching a particular course, it really does impact it a lot more than one may anticipate. So I think that is a factor that I didn’t actually think about when I was ... I did realise impacted me so much, like who’s going to be teaching me, but now when I was actually doing this activity, I was like it did affect me, and it's surprising.

Ryan Hinchey: Yeah.

“Student 10”: I found it surprising.

Ryan Hinchey: Yeah. I think this is a great time to actually do an activity like this ...
“Student 10”: Yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: ... because you can look back at your four years ...

“Student 10”: Exactly, yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: ... and say, maybe I had factors that I never knew before and have led me to this point now, so going forward even when you go into university, you can hopefully take some of these factors when you're thinking about your ...

“Student 10”: Yes. Yes.

Ryan Hinchey: ... courses. So your final factor that you talked about is your past experiences and your culture, so talk about that. I mean, how, culturally, what do you mean by that? Is it your Indian culture or your culture as a student or culture, what do you mean?

“Student 10”: By culture I was referring to like the Indian culture and like how my experiences in India shaped my choices here at “SCHOOL XYZ”, so like I said before, we focus a lot more on science in my family and in general in India, and so that shaped my interests, so I wouldn't say it's because I'm Indian that's why I picked science. It was because I'm Indian my past experiences as a child, I did abacus classes and I did so many science olympiads and I read science books for fun and that influenced me and shaped my interests, so yes, it may have started with my parents pushing me. Actually I kind of would say they pushed me in a particular direction because as a kid, I did art, piano, singing, maths, science, everything, so it's just they opened ... they gave me all the different things that they could think of and out of that, it shaped, those experiences and how much I enjoyed all of those different things, shaped my interests.

And I think for me, another big factor that shaped my interests was always my teachers, they're opinions of me and the grades that I got. For me, that's something that motivates me a lot, and so that again, shaped my interest and love for subjects.

Ryan Hinchey: Sure. Now you talked about sort of having to decide between medicine and New Media when you were in high school. If you had studied the New Media route and gone to study New Media at the university what do you think your Indian culture would have said about that?

“Student 10”: Very honestly, my grandparents would not have approved. My parents would not have, my mother ... they would have been supportive, but they would not have approved, and my ... like in
general, because in India we used to live in a society where you’re very close [inaudible 00:38:24] neighbours and everything, it would have just been like, she wasted her life because she’s so smart and she did not pick science. It’s just that mentality. I find it so hard to say and believe, but ... and I would like to think that I don’t think that way, but it’s almost heartbreaking when I think about some other friends of mine who always wanted to do something else and haven’t been able to do that because their fathers have been "Become an engineer now."

And so, no, I would not have been accepted too positively. I think my family, like I said, they would have been supportive, maybe not my grandfather, but yes, it would not have been a good decision.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. So that takes us to the end of the mind map. Is there ... I have some more questions for you, but you feel like we’ve covered sort of everything on there so far?

“Student 10”: Yes. I think so.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Another question I have for you is sort of looking back at your four years of high school. If there’s something that you could change and it could be a very small change with a course or a teacher or a huge structural change to an entire programme, like ...

“Student 10”: Right.

Ryan Hinchey: ... would you have changed anything in your entire four years?

“Student 10”: Wow. Okay. I think ... okay, so from the skills that I had in India to things that I found very different here, for mathematics in 10th grade, no one in my class knew how to use a protractor and I was shocked and I just didn’t know what to say because I was just so shocked, and I think for math, especially I feel like there’s a very high dependency on calculators. Maybe it’s a Western thing. I don’t know. In India, we never used calculators and I actually struggle using one till now because I don’t know what it does and how it does it. But I think we need to ...

I would personally not recommend calculators when I had been 10th grade and using more compasses and protractors and just learning how to use all of these things and like for the geometry course, like I expected people to know how to use a compass and a protractor, and it was just really disappointing that people did not. So I think that’s something that we need, especially like for instance, if someone’s going on to do an engineering degree or something, you will have to use them and to learn at that point like how to make a 60 degree angle
with a compass, it's ... yeah, I think it would be ... it's better to get that learning curve earlier than later.

And English, I think it's wonderfully structured. I think it's a wonderful blend of essay writing skills and analysis and everything. My English in fact I think has improved a lot since I've moved here and the other thing I think a little more stress on writing instead of typing because I just think when we're doing all our exams in writing, I think it's more important to just stress more about ... oh, yes, the biggest thing. Using pencils in high school. In India we never did that and I moved, I made that transition when I came here. I used to write in pens in 9th grade. In 10th grade I started writing in pencil, and I found that it brought my confidence down because in my IB exams, I used ... I wrote with erasable pens. I could not get myself to write with a pen and know that I cannot use whiteout.

Especially for mathematics, which is my favourite class and I love it so much. I was so confident in it, and it just ... using a pencil just brought my confidence down because I knew that if I made a mistake I could correct it. It was just, yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: When you moved here, did they encourage you ... did your teachers encourage you to use pencil then? Or was it just kind of the norm here at the school?

"Student 10": For mathematics, I think we were actually encouraged to use pencil, and it actually varied so much from teacher to teacher because I remember some of them were really just okay with using pencils. Some of them said you should write in pencil, and then there's actually really in [inaudible 00:42:52] New Media teacher was "Why do you write in pencil? You should be writing in pen," and New Media we did zero writing.

Ryan Hinchey: Yeah.

"Student 10": But it ... and this is not just me, like I've had conversations with my friends as well, and they said "It's so hard to make that switch from pencil back to pen," which I felt ... yeah, it linked to my confidence so much now, it was really bad actually.

Ryan Hinchey: That's interesting.

"Student 10": That's, yeah, definitely a change that I think should be there.

Ryan Hinchey: So do you think all classes then should be in pen?
Ryan Hinchey: Starting from 9th grade on?

“Student 10”: Yes, or even earlier.

Ryan Hinchey: And so you referenced that on your exams you had to write in pen?

“Student 10”: Yeah, yeah. On all of them.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay. Now, you had mentioned earlier that you have a younger sibling.

“Student 10”: Yes.

Ryan Hinchey: Are they at “SCHOOL XYZ” as well?

“Student 10”: Yes. Yes.

Ryan Hinchey: And what grade are they in?

“Student 10”: Seventh grade.

Ryan Hinchey: Okay, so they’re really just starting to think about some of the classes that ...

“Student 10”: Right.

Ryan Hinchey: ... they're going to be taking in high school, and really, some of the levels that they're going to take. For example, for math, students need to start thinking about it at quite an early age.

“Student 10”: Right.

Ryan Hinchey: What advice would you give your younger sibling about course selection in general?

“Student 10”: I think ... well, it doesn't exactly apply to him because he's moving back to India, but if he was here, I think I would say again, pick courses that you like. For instance, I know he really ... he's like me, he really enjoys mathematics and science, so I think pick courses that you like, but again, keep that balance between which ones you want to focus on and which ones not so much. What else?

I think, again, trying to follow your passion in the different subjects that you have for as long as you can, and while you know what your
parents say and what culture dictates is important, have that little bit of freedom and even if you can’t do a course, if you are passionate about something, just continue doing it.

Ryan Hinchey: That’s great. And those are all the questions that I have for you.

“Student 10”: Okay.

Ryan Hinchey: Do you feel like you got everything out that you wanted to talk about in your course [crosstalk 00:45:18].

“Student 10”: I think so, yeah.

Ryan Hinchey: Great. So, like going forward, I really want to thank you for participating today. Like I had mentioned to you before this, we’ll compile all the results. You’ll have access to your transcription and your recording if you want it, and hopefully this will ... with all the information that we gather can make change for the future, so I just wanted to thank you again.

“Student 10”: Thank you so much.