

# A market study to determine the viability and design features of a course offering to help high school students present their “interest portfolios” for college admissions

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## INTRODUCTION

### Motivation

- ✧ According to the IES National Center for Education Statistics, in fall 2015, roughly 20.2 million students were expected to attend American colleges and universities
- ✧ Students typically spend, in aggregate, hundreds of hours on activities outside of their academic curriculum in order to pursue hobbies and passion projects.
- ✧ There is increasing and unrelenting pressure to build a dossier of activities and projects done outside the classroom which are not reflected in their transcripts but yet have merit.
- ✧ A large number of students struggle to present their accomplishments outside the classroom in a coherent way that makes them credible in the eyes of admission officers.

### Project Goal

- ✧ The School of The New York Times (“NYT Education”) was recently launched and includes a pre-collegiate program that includes offerings "to present a new kind of classroom where students can develop their skills and build their futures" ([nyedu.org](http://nyedu.org))
- ✧ Current offerings include weekend courses where students meet thought leaders and learn about topics they don't typically encounter as part of high school curricula.
- ✧ The goal of this research project was to help NYT Education address the questions–  
*“What if NYT education were to create a course offering that would help students bring credibility and refinement to their “interest portfolios”? Would there be interest among students? What would such a course look like?”*

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

**RQ1. How can we gauge interest in students for a course offering that would help high school students to effectively present their interest portfolios to colleges?**

**RQ2. What are the characteristics of a course offering that would successfully help high school students to effectively present their interest portfolios to colleges?**

## MATERIALS & METHODS

### Methods (RQ1): Survey Instrument

- Designed in consultation with the mentor & in consultation with the client (NYT Education)

#### Three main elements of the survey

1. Student demographic data
  - ✓ High school year & Location
2. Information on typical extra-curricular activities
3. Students’ reactions to and preference for format of the course offering

#### Other guidelines

- ✓ Online
- ✓ Anonymous
- ✓ SHORT! (2-3 minutes; max 8-10 questions)

### Methods (RQ2): Analysis & Design

- Collected data from a sample 31 high school students in the Bay Area (and elsewhere)
- Mixed Method ((qualitative and quantitative) Data
- “Qualitatively coded” extra-curricular activities to determine categories (Chi, 1996)
- Frequency distributions of responses to course format questions
- Preliminary design of product provided to NYT Education

#### Survey Page 2

3. In your opinion what are the 5 most important extra curricular activities you're involved in.  
List them in decreasing order of how important you think each activity is to college acceptance (Most important first)

(a)  Characters Remaining: 40

(b)  Characters Remaining: 40

(c)  Characters Remaining: 40

(d)  Characters Remaining: 40

(e)  Characters Remaining: 40

4. Are there any activities you're not doing (that perhaps a friend is doing) that you think you should be?

(a)  Characters Remaining: 40

(b)  Characters Remaining: 40

(c)  Characters Remaining: 40

#### Survey Page 3

Imagine an "extracurricular course of study"—an online or “blended” course that would help you to present the most compelling portfolio of your extracurricular activities.

5. How important do you think an extracurricular course of study would be to your college admissions process.

☐ Not at all important  
☐ Not important  
☐ Somewhat important  
☐ Extremely important

6. What type of extracurricular course would you be interested in taking? (Rank in order of most to least importance)

Online only  Please Rank:

In-person only  Please Rank:

Blended (some mix of online and in-person)  Please Rank:

7. Any additional thoughts on the format of the "extracurricular course"?

Characters Remaining: 100

8. How much time (in hours/week) would you commit to a course like the one you described?

Select:

9. What are your thoughts on how an online/blended course such as this might be difficult or beneficial to your objectives?

Characters Remaining: 250

10. What would you be willing to pay as an annual fee for this course?

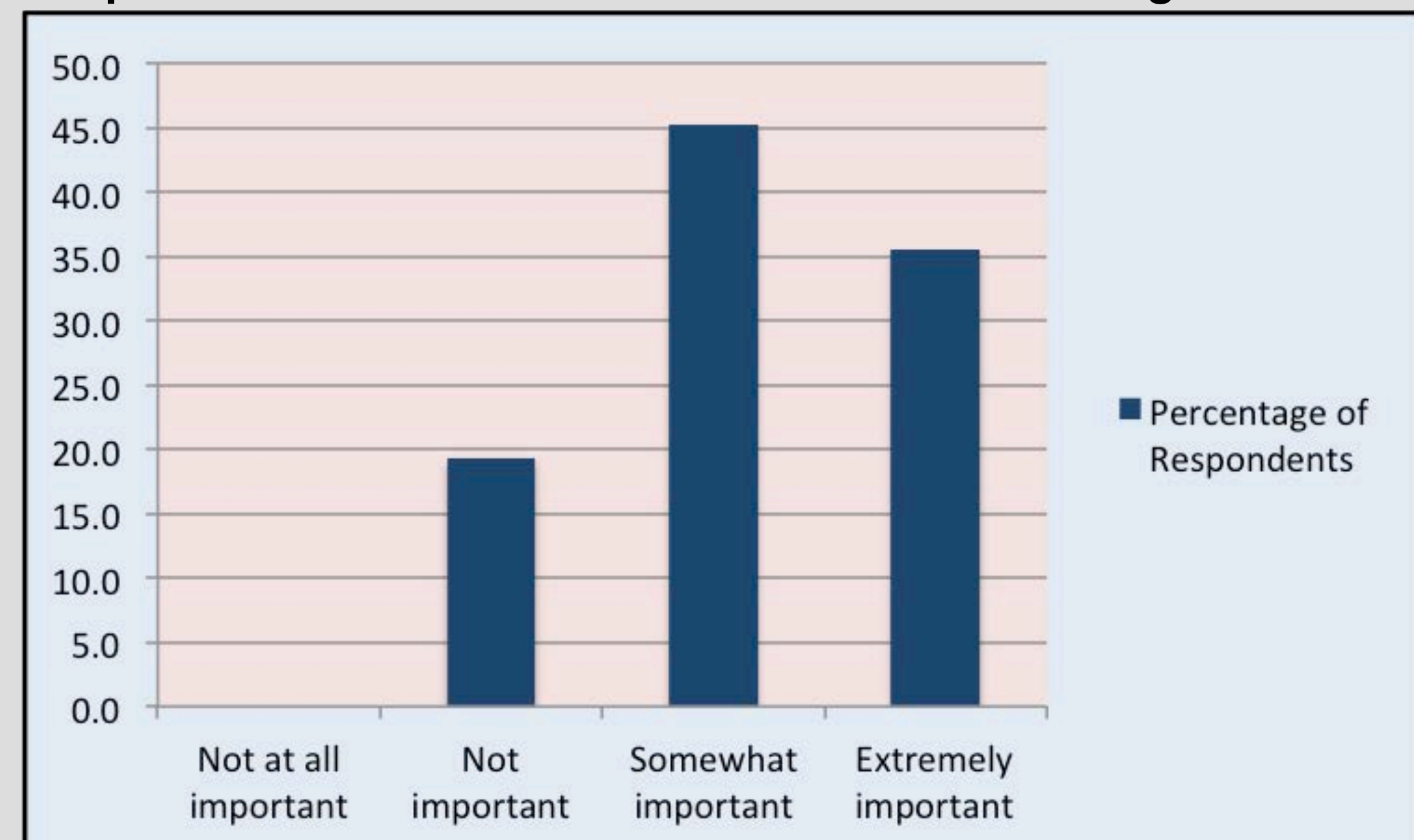
Select:

11. Would you be comfortable discussing such a course in a classroom or with friends?

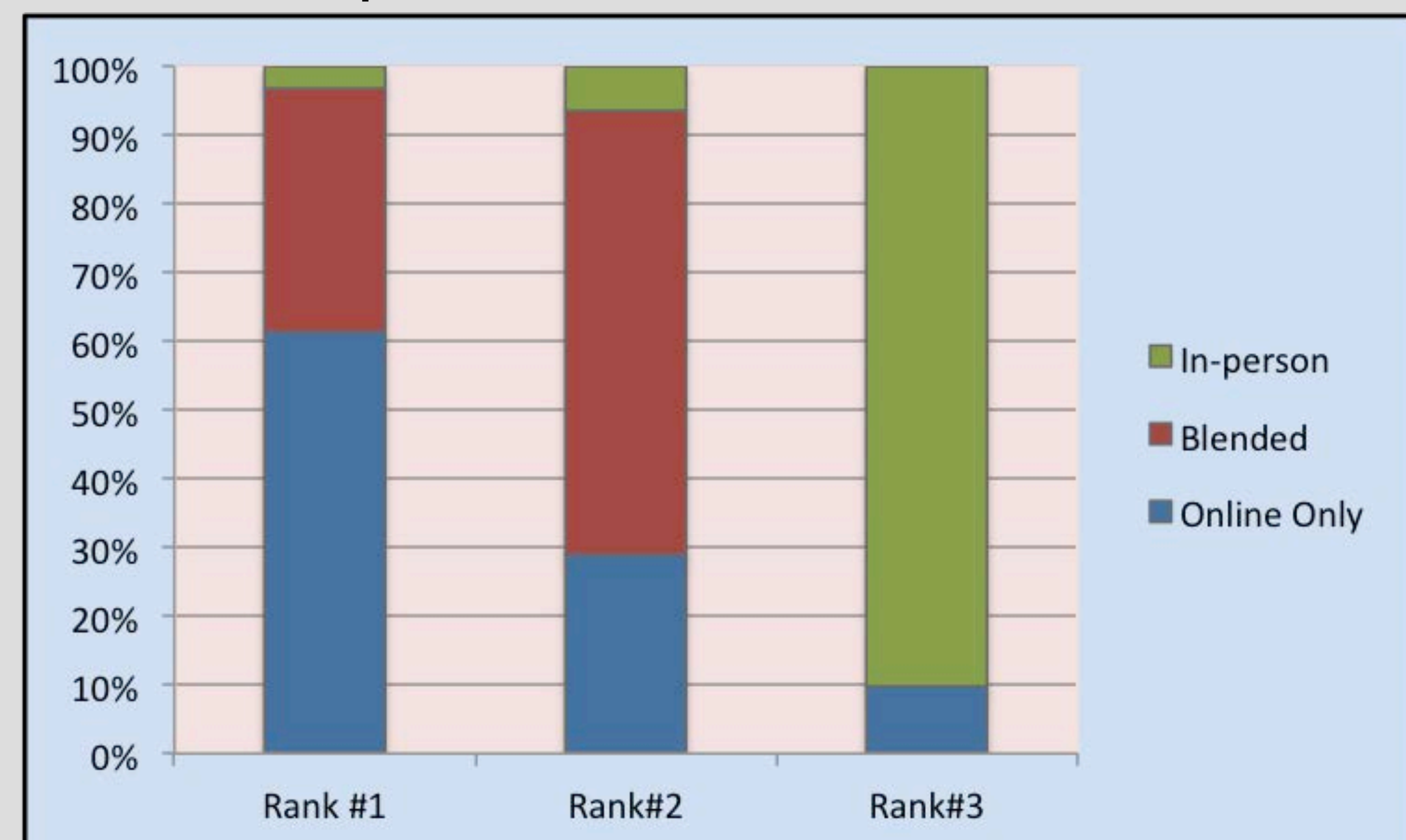
☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Other (Please specify)

## RESULTS

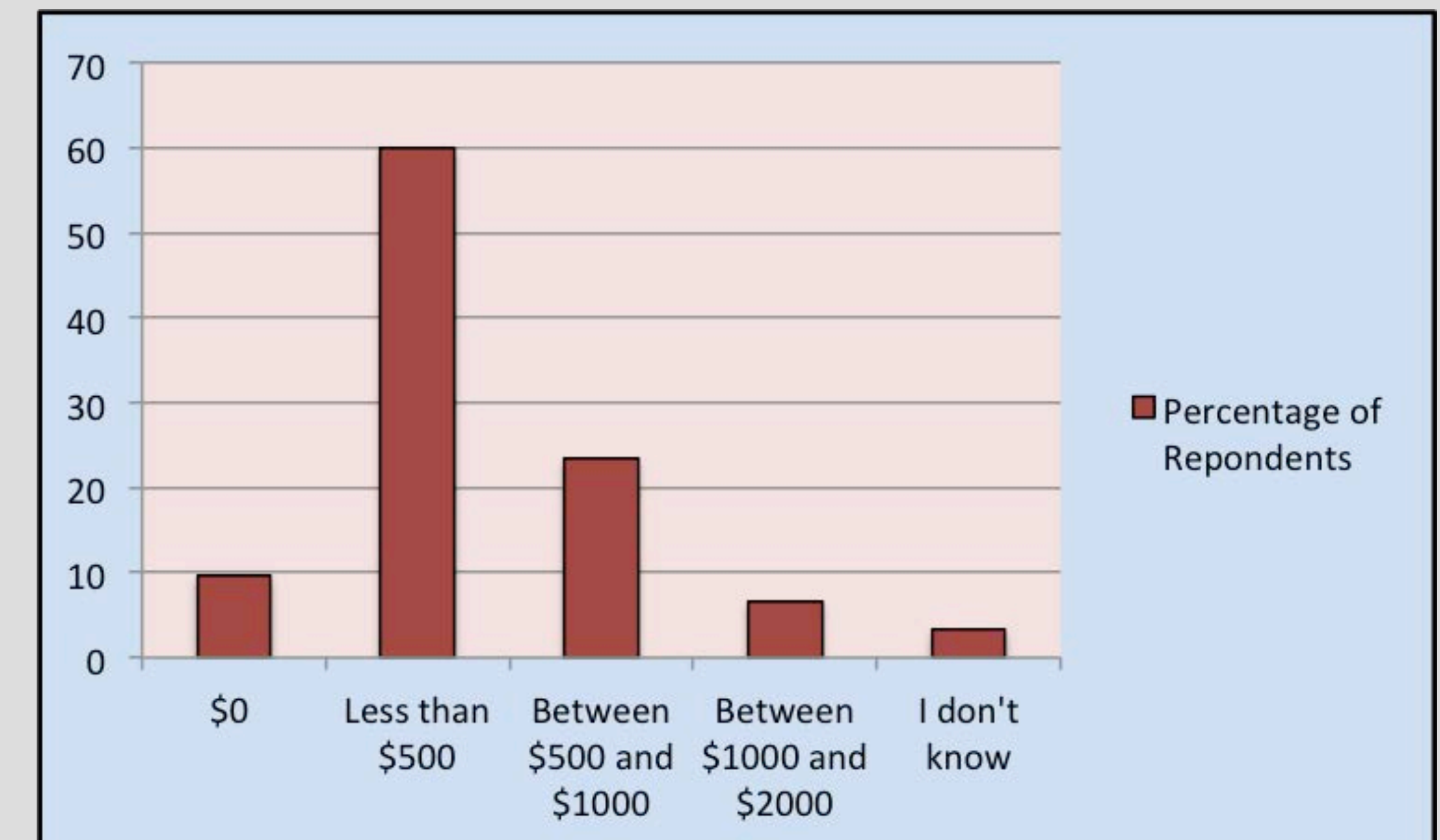
### How important did students think such a course offering would be?



### What are students’ preferred formats for the course?



### How much are students willing to pay for such a course?



- Respondents were willing to spend on **average 4.03 hours per week** on the course (Standard deviation: **1.87 hours**; Min: **1 hour**; Max: **6 hours**)
- **84%** of the sample responded that they were comfortable discussing such a course with their friends or in the classroom; **10%** were not; and **6%** said it depended on details of the course
- The **6 most common types of extracurricular activities** included STEM clubs, competitions, research (e.g. USAMO, Science Olympiad), performing arts (drama, choir, orchestra), Sports, Speech & Debate, community service (including tutoring), and computer programming/robotics.

## SUMMARY / CONCLUSIONS

### “CollegeXtra” Course Concept

Based on the results, and in consultation with my mentor, the research suggests the following feature recommendations for a pilot course offering—

1. Online course with certification
  - a) Live sessions with access to recordings
  - b) Optional contact sessions
  - c) 3 and 6 month options with open enrollment
  - d) Capstone project related to college application.
2. Flexible enrollment for high school students
3. Would need expertise on the most common types of extracurricular activities shown in the findings
4. Beta launch in Fall 2017
5. Priced at less than \$299 per student

### Limitations

- The sample size was not very large
- The sample was mostly drawn from a one area of the country.
- Due to time constraints, interviews could not be conducted to get more in-depth insights.

### Future Work

- Expand the survey base to see if similar results are found with a larger and more diverse sample.
- Pilot the course with a small test group to validate prototype course design and based on findings, refine the course offering.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS / REFERENCES

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### References

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