

Accessibility of Academic Resources Outside of a School Setting

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Introduction

Our project was designed with the intention of creating an [easy to use, personalized online tutoring program](#) that can fit the needs of all students by providing qualified tutors at any needed time. We based our initial idea and business plan off of the concepts of the popular rideshare company Uber, in the sense that we wanted to essentially create an [on the go, on demand tutoring app](#) that would connect tutees with tutors quickly and easily.

But first, it is important to understand the [American need for tutors](#); after all, if there is no demand, our product and design would serve no purpose. In the past, tutors have been empirically proven to [support and bolster academic learning](#)¹. In a paper from November 2009, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that “about 12 percent of students attending schools that did not make AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress, a program under the CA Department of Education)... received tutoring services other than free tutoring from their school. Among these students, 27 percent received tutoring that was paid for, in whole or in part, by their household”¹. This demonstrates that although a fair portion of the public does indeed use tutoring, our program would still have a large enough target audience to

go after in order to be successful. More telling, however, was the statistic regarding *satisfaction* with current tutoring systems: “63 percent had parents who reported being very satisfied with the free tutoring their child received. Fifty-four percent reported being very satisfied with other tutoring services,” and in terms of tutoring for older children, “the percentage of students whose parents were very satisfied with other tutoring services varied by grade level, with a larger percentage of students in grades K–5 than in grades 6–8 having parents who were very satisfied with other tutoring services”¹. The important trend that this illustrated was the fact that merely [one half of current tutoring institutions are actually satisfactory to their users](#), and there is also an inverse trend between age of students and success of tutoring. As students age, they find tutoring to be less effective, proving that our tutoring system would indeed have a niche in the high school environment today as it [satisfies a proven need: the need for effective and cost efficient tutoring for high school students](#).

¹ “Students’ Use of Tutoring Services, by Adequate Yearly Progress Status of School.” *Encyclopedia of Education Economics & Finance* (2009): 11. *National Center for Education Statistics*. Web.

Methods and Materials

As our project is [highly dependent on user input](#), our main method of research was surveying Paly’s student population through a Google survey, where we asked questions on study habits and tutoring. In order to conduct a more thorough level of research, we separated subjects into two types of surveys: one an [in depth questionnaire that was asked in person](#) to random students, and the other a [similar survey in electronic form](#) released through Facebook to students of Palo Alto High School. We approached a random sample of roughly 8 people in the library of different ethnicities and grade levels and asked them the following set of questions:

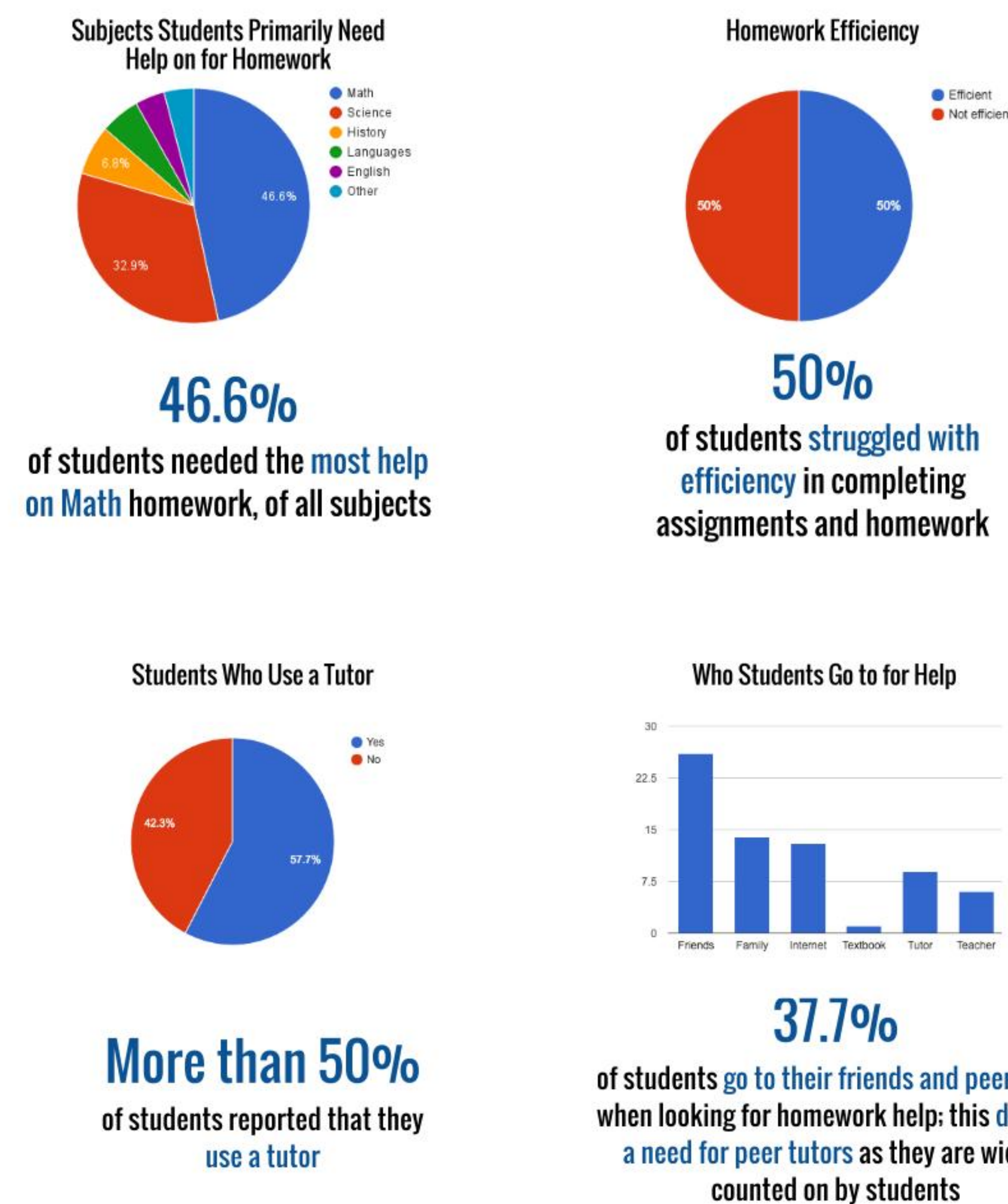
Individual Survey Questions

1. How are your homework habits (are you efficient)?
2. How does that translate to your grades/test scores?
3. Do you generally need help with your homework; in what subjects? If yes, who do you go to for help?
4. Do you use a tutor? How did you find the tutor/was it easy to find a tutor?
5. What do you think of this idea?
6. If you were to get tutored, what time is best for you?
7. If you were to get tutored in this program, would you be willing to tutor others?
8. Would you be willing to pay for tutoring from a fellow student?

Online Survey Questions

1. How are your homework habits on a nightly basis (are you efficient, why or why not)?
2. What subjects do you primarily need help on when doing homework?
3. If you need help, who do you primarily go to for help?
4. Do you use a tutor?
5. If you use a tutor, how did you find the tutor? Is it a tutor at PALY? Was the process of finding a tutor easy?
6. Would you be willing to pay for one-on-one tutoring from a fellow student (who has taken the class before and has been successful in the class)?
7. How much would you be willing to pay for one-on-one tutoring?
8. Do you have any initial thoughts or ideas on our idea?
9. Would you be willing to use the proposed system?
10. If not, what would you change?
11. Would you be willing to tutor others in return for getting tutored?

Data



46.6%
of students needed the most help on Math homework, of all subjects

50%
of students struggled with efficiency in completing assignments and homework

More than 50%
of students reported that they use a tutor

37.7%
of students go to their friends and peers first when looking for homework help; this depicts a need for peer tutors as they are widely counted on by students

Results

Our data revealed some largely surprising facts; for example, although Palo Alto is well known for its rigorous academics and high achieving students, around half the students we surveyed reported that they *struggle with efficiency in doing homework*.

Are certain imperfections in Palo Alto’s school system being masked by its aura of excellence?

Once again, we noted a demonstrated need for homework assistance and aid from others.

Discussion

Although most students were supportive of our idea, the **biggest concern was the pricing**, as many were unwilling to pay for student-to-student tutoring. However, those who were willing to pay preferred a \$10-15 fee, as long as the [tutors were reliable and had been previously screened for qualifications](#). Some who were unwilling to pay for our service suggested [community service hours as an alternative method of payment](#), and 75% of students were also interested in tutoring others in exchange to getting tutored, thus eliminating the need for a monetary payment.

“If it requires you to pay, I feel like people wouldn’t be likely to use it because you can ask your smart friends for free, unless it is aimed more for extended tutoring. But if it is free I feel like it could be a very good service that would be more reliable than friends.”

“I like the idea because I think there is a need for a clear way to find tutors at Paly.”

As we designed our business to be student-to-student tutoring in order to differentiate it from already existing competitors, this brought up the question of the [credibility and reliability of a student tutor](#) and the benefits of a student tutor as opposed to asking a friend. There were also questions on the [advantages over Paly’s already established Academic Resource Center \(ARC\) tutoring system](#), where students sign up to be tutored or to tutor via email, and tutors are compensated through extra credit in the subject they tutor in. Some students were also concerned that [establishing a tutor-tutee relationship would be more beneficial than a “drop-in” style of tutoring](#) where a tutor or tutee would be matched up once, and would not necessarily be partnered with the same person repeatedly. However, this could be easily remedied through a [“favorites” page](#) listing previous tutors or tutees and the ability to request a certain person.

Conclusion

Our primary goal in conducting this research project was to [get a better feel of the academic learning environment](#) at Palo Alto High School and to aid the students in need of academic assistance. As students ourselves, we have witnessed firsthand the stressful [“pressure cooker” environment](#) in our school district, and we wanted to combat it through a system of [low-stress and easily accessible tutoring](#). This was the primary aim of our tutoring system we sought to establish; although we did not manage to complete the site itself, we were able to garner valuable insight on the minds of students at our school through our extensive research and analysis of student habits. One of the most surprising survey results that we received was that the [process of finding a tutor outside of Paly was difficult](#) for many students who did not have connections through friends or family members. Our website is structured to eliminate this problem, as students would only need to sign up as a tutor or tutee to connect with others.

In all, the research we were able to conduct and conclusions we were able to reach were able to help us design and come up with the concepts for a [website that would satisfy as many needs as possible](#) here at Palo Alto High School and hopefully, at other schools as well in the future. Though we were unable to produce the final site itself this year, the hope is that eventually, we will be able to implement our idea and [create a serviceable product that benefits the whole community](#).

References

First and foremost, we would like to thank our mentor, Lili Jiang, for her invaluable advice and support for our project throughout the year. We would never have had the courage to tackle a project of such magnitude without her experience and expertise in the business realm. Whether it was demonstrating how to wireframe a website or how to identify the “MVPs” of our product, Lili offered us indispensable advice on how to carry out our research and reach a high level final research project. We thank the Advanced Authentic Research program coordinator, Dr. Jeong Choe, for her guidance throughout this process, and for her willingness to meet with us to answer any types of questions we had regarding the program or our project. Without her constant motivation and enthusiasm, we would not have been able to create such a relevant and meaningful project. A big thank you as well to AAR coach Ms. Alice Hahn for editing our final poster.

We would also like to show our gratitude to the 60 anonymous students who helped us gather user research and gave us constructive advice on our project idea, which has undoubtedly aided in the continuous evolution of our project.