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Insufficient Post Secondary Information for

Students in Alternative Schools

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#### Author Note

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### **Abstract**

Access to resources and information is important as it can help individuals plan for future goals and enable them to become successful in life. Youth Alliance is a non-profit organization that serves children, youth, and families through culturally relevant services and programs. A program offered is Restorative Justice, which serves at-risk youth at a continuation school. Few students continue with their education after graduating from alternative schools. Insufficient knowledge about post-secondary education as well as discouragement from peers and academic history contribute to students not acquiring a post-secondary education. Consequently, these individuals are more likely to fall into the school to prison pipeline, have low socioeconomic status, and suffer from poor health conditions. To address students not having appropriate information and resources, the project was designed to provide students with post-secondary and financial aid information. Eighty-three students were advised to view an eight-minute video that contained a post-secondary education and financial aid presentation. The video provided an overview of post-secondary institutions, college requirements, application deadlines, and a description of the four types of financial aid available. After viewing the video the students were advised to complete a post-survey. The findings indicated that more than half the respondents were interested in higher education and that they would need assistance with their transition into a post-secondary institution. To provide students with appropriate support, it is recommended that post-secondary information videos, in-person presentations, or virtual workshops are offered to the students.

*Keywords:* higher education, post-secondary education, continuation school, alternative school, students

### **Agency & Communities Served**

Youth Alliance is a non-profit organization that was founded in 1995. It serves children, youth, and families in San Benito County and South Santa Clara. The agency's mission "is to provide innovative and culturally relevant services that strengthen and enrich youth, families, and the community" and vision "is to empower youth as leaders who contribute to the social and economic betterment of their community" (Youth Alliance, 2014). Annually, Youth Alliance serves over 6,500 children, youth, and families through after school programs, community outreach, and youth support services (Youth Alliance, 2014). After-school programs "serve over 2,500 youth each day" offering them a safe space to receive homework assistance and participate in recreation and enrichment activities. Resources and information that connect youth and families to pathways of opportunities are provided through community outreach. Support services provide counseling, family support, and guidance to help build positive relationships and cultivate personal strengths and life purpose (Youth Alliance, 2014). One of the programs that fall under the youth support services is Restorative Justice (RJ).

The Restorative Justice program is offered at San Andreas Continuation High School Pinnacles Community School, and Santa Ana Opportunity School all located in Hollister, CA. San Andreas has an enrollment of 67 students and Pinnacles and Santa Ana combined have 16 students. The students attending these schools have either been expelled from their prior school, are on probation, or were not meeting high school graduation requirements. "Restorative Justice is a set of principles and practices employed to build community and respond to student misconduct, with the goals of repairing harm and restoring relationships between those impacted" as stated on the Youth Alliances website (2014). The use of RJ allows for less

punitive punishment as communication is essential for building a safer school environment. The RJ program uses dialogue as the means to both prevent and respond to harm. Students and teachers have the opportunity to participate in RJ circles, which are used to support and facilitate dialogue, build community, and strengthen relationships. The program also offers case management services to fifteen students at San Andreas Continuation High School. Participating students are required to meet for a minimum of thirty minutes per week. Case management services include the development of an individualized support plan, linkage to other supportive services, vocational coaching, and exposure to educational opportunities.

### **Problem Description**

Few students at alternative high schools are continuing with their education after graduating. A person's decision on whether to further their education can be influenced by personal and social factors. Often decisions are reflected based on the student's understanding of higher education and academic readiness. Continuation schools are offered to students who are falling behind in high school credits and at risk of not graduating. Besides insufficient credits, students also enter continuation schools as a result of high truancy rates, expulsions, and behavioral challenges. Students in these educational systems are often less preoccupied with achieving a higher education. Most student's goals are focused on graduating from high school so that they can carry on with their lives outside of the educational system. Academic curriculums at continuation school are different from traditional high school which may create student academic discrepancies. Students at these schools are less likely to be offered courses that prepare them for a college transition or provided with college and career information.

Furthermore not having appropriate preparation or guidance can affect whether a student decides to continue with their education or not.

Introducing higher education to students in continuation schools is important as it may spark an interest in those students who never considered obtaining a higher education. Many students become discouraged from higher education due to academic standing and not having the appropriate support. Higher education in this day in age is becoming essential for achieving success. People who acquire higher education are more likely to secure jobs and earning, live healthier lives, and “are far less likely to engage in criminal activity” (Farris, 2014, p. 1). People who do not acquire higher education will encounter limited employment opportunities which will impact their lifestyle. Moreover, students who attend continuation schools are at higher risk of not completing high school and at greater risk of not being able to achieve higher education.

### **Contributing Factors**

Insufficient knowledge of higher education contributes to students not achieving or receiving post-secondary education. First-generation students are most likely to lack this information, as they come from backgrounds where college information is scarce.

First-generation students are students whose parents and or guardians did not obtain a college degree. Hallet (2015), states that the “complex path to college access is further complicated for first-generation college students due to the lack of firsthand parent knowledge of the college process” (p. 103). Not being aware of the different college systems, college requirements, and college or financial aid process intimidates students and discourages them from applying to post-secondary institutions. Many students at San Andreas Continuation School, Pinnacles Community School, and Santa Ana Opportunity School are first-generation, which implies that

the probability of them being familiar with higher education information is minimal.

First-generation students “have been historically under-represented in higher education and continue to enroll and persist in college at lower rates” (Martinez, 2014, p. 94). Not having or being provided with essential post-secondary information contributes to the underrepresentation of first-generation students in college. Malone (2013) mentions that “access to accurate and comprehensive information about college can aid individual student’s post-secondary decision-making process” (p. 3). Providing students with college information is crucial, as students who are unfamiliar with college pathways and requirements are more inclined to set college aside. Not every student desires to acquire a post-secondary education. However, students must have access to post-secondary information so that they have options for educational and career development and advancement.

Discouragement from peers can affect whether a student decides to continue with their education. Students who attend continuation schools are often negatively labeled. They are referred to as bad students, delinquents, at risk, and their academic potential is highly looked down upon. Family members, school staff, and other members of the community contribute to the negative labeling of students. Negative labeling and stereotyping can create internal conflicts for these students and discourage them from making positive life choices, such as acquiring a post-secondary education. Family involvement is crucial in a student's educational development. Lack of support and value from family members can impact students' academic expectations and goals, causing them to lose educational motivation (Hallet, 2014). School staff may discourage students from aspiring to higher education by making negative comments about their academic performance, students' living situation, and by not creating a college-going culture. According to

Welton and Williams (2015) in a “college going culture, all stakeholders set high expectations on academic achievement for all students and ensure all students have the resources, preparation, and support they need for post-secondary education” (p.184-185). Academic stigmas may arise from school staff as a result of the stereotypes connected to continuation schools (Welton & Williams, 2015, p. 183). This may cause staff to have low expectations for the students and discard the importance of creating a college-going culture. Negative labeling and support from peers cause students to develop mindsets that are congruent with what others think of them (Sumbera, 2017, p. 24). Students can become mentally and emotionally affected by the labeling and discouragement from peers, which may impact their ability to academically and personally excel.

A student's academic history can also discourage them from obtaining a post-secondary education. Students at continuation schools are often falling behind on academic credits and tend to have lower academic grades when compared to students at traditional high schools. Moreover, students at continuation schools are offered less rigorous academic courses and basic curriculums which impacts their academic development (Dunning-Lozano, 2016, p. 433). Perez-Felkner (2015) mentions that school context can influence a student's pathway to higher education and it most certainly does (p. 4). Continuation schools provide students the ability “to earn a high school diploma from the continuation high school” however the academic curriculums at these schools do not necessarily prepare students for higher education, which impacts their educational pathway (Dunning-Lozano, 2016, p. 436). Becoming aware of the requirements for a four-year institution during one's final years in high school can either make or break one's goals. Students who realize that they are not meeting college requirements may lose interest in exploring



different educational pathways. Students at continuation schools are less likely to be offered courses that allow them to fulfill a set of approved college courses, known as the A-G requirements. When students realize that they do not have grades of C or better, GPA is below the required one, A-G courses were not fulfilled, and college entrance exams were not taken they doubt their ability to acquire a post-secondary education. Students who realize that their academic history does not reflect that which is needed for the eligibility requirements become discouraged. Many students end up discarding the fact that there are options that can help them attain a post-secondary education.

### **Consequences**

The school to prison pipeline (STPP) pushes students out of schools and into juvenile and criminal justice systems. Students who face punitive disciplinary actions from zero-tolerance policies in school systems often become fed into the STPP (Spence, 2020, p. 228). According to Spence (2020) “students of color who are poverty-stricken are frequently faced with disciplinary sanctions” which makes them vulnerable to falling into the STPP system (p. 231). Additionally, many of the students who fall into the STPP have learning disabilities or histories of abuse or neglect. Failure to provide them with adequate resources contributes to their entrance into the STPP. Students in continuation schools are at higher risk of falling into the STPP. Some students in continuation schools already face juvenile and criminal justice systems, which makes it important to redirect them into alternative paths. They should be encouraged to pursue pathways that will positively contribute to their lives so that they don't feel like their only path in life is to fall into the STPP. If adolescents are not encouraged and provided with resources that will help them excel in life they will end up falling into the criminal justice system, which may have a

negative impact on their lives. Tyler and Brockmann (2017) mention that “for those who are or have been incarcerated, the social, economic and health implications are enormous” (p. 545). Stigma, labeling, and disparities arise from falling into the criminal justice system which negatively impacts a person’s life and social environment. Furthermore, the school to prison pipeline will not only impact the student life but also the community in which they reside.

People who do not acquire a post-secondary education are at higher risk of falling into a low socioeconomic status. Low socioeconomic status individuals are more likely to experience financial insecurities which affect their quality of life. Jury, Bruno, and Darnon (2018) state that “entering college opens the perspective of upward mobility” (p. 661). Entering a post-secondary institution allows individuals to become eligible for higher-paying jobs which can create opportunities for upward mobility. According to Jury, Smeding, Stephens, Nelson, Aelenei, and Darnon (2017) nearly four decades ago “28% of jobs required post-secondary education” and it is estimated that by “2020 postsecondary education will be required for 65% of jobs” (p. 24). The increase of post-secondary education for job security will most likely increase as years advance making the labor force highly competitive. Individuals who do not have a post-secondary education will have limited employment options and the jobs they get offered will most likely be minimum wage jobs. Often, income problems prevent individuals from obtaining essential living resources and cause them to have a lower quality of life. Insufficient income causes many individuals to struggle with housing, medical insurance, and food supply which leads many to receive public assistance. Having a low socioeconomic status, also confines individuals to live in specific areas. Generally, the communities in which they reside are not the safest and are greatly lacking in community resources. Individuals who do not have higher

education will encounter employment disadvantages and financial barriers, which will prevent them from moving up in socioeconomic status.

Individuals who do not obtain a post-secondary education are at high risk of suffering from poor health. Contrary individuals who acquire a college education are said to “live longer and healthier lives than those with fewer years of schooling” (Virginia Commonwealth, 2015). Ma, Pender, and Welch (2016) state that “higher levels of education correspond to more access to healthcare” and that individuals with more education are more likely to make better health decisions (p. 7). On the other hand, lower educated individuals, who are most likely of low socioeconomic status, have less access to healthcare resources. They are probable to “exhibit suboptimal health behaviors” such as disengaging from preventative health care, avoiding regular doctor visits, and eating unhealthy diets (Leonard, Hughes, & Pruitt, 2017, p. 2). Usually, these behaviors occur as a result of having fewer economic and health care resources as well as health knowledge. According to Van Zon, Reijneveld, Mendes de Leon, and Bültmann (2017) across the US “poor general physical and mental health status, and cardiovascular diseases have been associated with unemployment” (p. 998). Lack of unemployment as well as minimum wage employment bring multiple stressors into an individual's life which can heavily impact their physical and mental health. Not being able to appropriately and timely manage one's health can lead to a future of high health complications.

### **Problem Model**

<b>Contributing Factors</b>	<b>Problem</b>	<b>Consequences</b>
Factor 1: Insufficient knowledge of post-secondary education (first generation).	Few students at alternative high schools are continuing with their education after graduating.	Consequence 1: School to prison pipeline.
Factor 2: Discouragement		Consequence 2: Higher rates

from peers (family, friends, school staff, society)		low socioeconomic status.
Factor 3: Discouragement based on prior/current academic history.		Consequence 3: High risk of suffering from poor health.

### **Capstone Project Description and Justification**

#### **Capstone Project and Project Purpose**

The capstone project provided students at San Andreas Continuation High School, Pinnacles Community School, and Santa Ana Opportunity School with post-secondary and financial aid information. The project addressed the need of providing students with post-secondary information and resources, so that lack of information does not become a barrier to those students interested in furthering their education. Many students lack information regarding college requirements, the application process, and financial aid. Not being familiar with this information can discourage students from continuing their education, more so if they are first-generation students. San Andreas has a school counselor on-site, who can provide students with college information. However, students are not likely to reach out to the counselor on their own. Therefore, finding different methods to provide students with post-secondary information was necessary.

The purpose of the capstone project was to provide students with college and financial aid information. The information was provided to students via a video which included a presentation on post-secondary education and financial aid. The presentation that was shared with the students included information on A-G subject requirements, post-secondary institutions, eligibility requirements, the application process, and the four types of financial aid. Students

were also provided with a PDF version of the PowerPoint that was used on the video presentation and had the opportunity to schedule a virtual one-on-one appointment. Equipping students with the right resources and information helps them become better prepared and build educational and personal confidence. With higher education information students can plan for higher education attainment and explore options after they graduate.

### **Project Justification**

Continuation schools allow students to continue with their education outside of regular high schools. However, attending a continuation school might limit the number of services and resources these students receive. For example, students at continuation high school might have fewer resources that can help them navigate the college system. These students tend to be misperceived and labeled and many individuals doubt their ability to continue with their education. Support is essential for student success however these students often end up lacking both parental and school staff support and motivation. Rodriguez, Rhodes, and Aguirre (2015) state that “guidance from high school faculty and staff, as well as from other experts, is critical to increasing the college enrollment of [students]” (p. 212). First-generation students typically tend to lack college information and support. Furthermore, not being able to acquire it through school staff impacts their ability to comprehend and navigate the college system. Students must be provided with college information and assistance regardless of the high school they attend. Lack of information should not be one of the reasons students do not continue with their education. For this reason, this capstone project provides students with post-secondary and financial aid information and resources. According to Meyer and Zane (2013), “some studies have shown racial match to be associated with increased utilization, [favorable outcomes, and greater

satisfaction]” (p. 3). A racial match is important as students tend to feel most comfortable interacting with staff with whom they can identify. Racial matches were provided, as students and the presenter were able to share a similar racial background. Being able to connect with students is of great importance as it can influence a student’s intake and retention of information.

### **Project Implementation**

The post-secondary and financial aid presentation was supposed to be given as an in-person presentation. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the presentation delivery method had to be changed, and the most convenient way to do it was via a video. The idea of hosting a virtual presentation via a Zoom meeting was considered. However, there was a high probability that students were not going to join the meeting. The initial plan for the distribution of the video was to send it out via email to the students along with a pre and post-survey. The pre-survey was supposed to be sent to the students one week before the video and post-survey was. To eliminate confusion and the number of emails going back and forth the plan of using email was discarded and so was the pre-survey. Although the pre-survey was removed, the questions created for it were included in the post-survey. To ensure that students were provided with the information the video and a post-survey were implemented as an extra credit class assignment.

In preparation for the video, a PowerPoint presentation was created. Information regarding post-secondary institutions and financial aid had to be researched and made sure it was current as the pandemic also impacted college requirements. Additionally interning with the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs facilitated the gathering of college information. The contributing factors were taken into account when creating the survey questions. Other questions were created to find out whether the information was useful and to

obtain information regarding students' post-high school graduation plans. Once the PowerPoint and the post-survey were completed they were emailed for revision and approval. The video was recorded upon PowerPoint approval and suggestions were taken into consideration and implemented on the post-survey. On October 28, 2020, an eight-minute video and post-survey were emailed to the principal's assistant. The principal's assistant was responsible for contacting the two English teachers which serve students at all three schools and notifying them of the project. The English teachers were asked to upload the video and survey to their Google classrooms and offer it as an extra credit assignment to the students.

The video which included the post-secondary education and financial aid presentation and the post-survey was made visible to eighty-three students on October 29, 2020. To facilitate different learning styles students were able to visually follow along as a PowerPoint was used to present the information to students. The PowerPoint presentation included information on; A-G subject requirements, post-secondary institutions specifically community college, California State University, and the University of California, college eligibility requirements, application process, and an explanation of the 4 types of financial aid which include federal/state grants, scholarships, work-study, and loans. To make the information accessible to students they were provided with a PDF version of the PowerPoint. The PowerPoint PDF included links to important websites to help facilitate and eliminate any browsing confusion.

After watching the video the students were asked to complete a post-survey which included 13 questions. The survey included 12 multiple choice questions and 1 optional short answer question. The post-survey include questions that were designed to determine the number of students who were classified as first-generation, parents or guardians highest grade level, the

number of times that the students had participated in a college presentation within the last year, how often a parent or school staff encourages a college-going culture, and if the student is interested in attending college. Other questions included were created to find out whether the presentation was useful and included the following questions; how important was this information, how useful is this information, how likely are you to reach out to school staff for college and financial aid assistance, how likely are you to apply to a post-secondary school. Additionally, students were asked for their plans after high school, if they would be interested in scheduling a virtual one-on-one appointment for more information or assistance, and if they had any questions or suggestions. Students who were interested in virtual appointments were contacted from November 9, 2020, through November 13, 2020.

### **Assessment Plan and Expected Outcomes**

The assessment plan consisted of keeping track of how many students completed the post-survey. The video was uploaded on YouTube so that views would be recorded and used to determine if students watched the video. The total number of students at the school were used to cross-reference participation. Student engagement was recorded on a document to keep track of participation. A post-assessment was used to help identify the effectiveness of the workshops as well as any concerns, suggestions, or recommendations the participants may have had. Besides providing students with college information and resources, the project intends to motivate and spark higher education interests in these students. The goal of the implementation of this project is to motivate at least five students to attend a post-secondary institution and complete the financial aid application.

### **Project Results**



The video and survey were made available to 83 students. Students were given thirteen days to view the video and complete the survey. On November 9, 2020, the video views and the survey responses were assessed. According to YouTube, the video was viewed 21 times and the survey was completed by 30 students. As expected, all 30 students revealed that they had not participated in any college workshop within the last year. In regards to parents' college attainment, more than half of the students indicated that their parents did not have a college degree. As a result, those students interested in pursuing higher education would be classified as first-generation students. Additionally, these students are less likely to receive college assistance from their parents as it is very likely that they are unfamiliar with the college process. Encouragement from peers is important and 40 percent of students reported that a school staff member often encourages them to attend college and 33 percent reported that their parents always encourage them.

More than half of the respondents disclosed that they think about college which indicates that students do consider college as an option. Students were asked to rate their level of interest towards higher education based on a 1 to 5 scale (1 indicating not interested and 5 indicating very interested). The responses revealed that 70 percent of students were interested in higher education. When asked about their plans after high school 8 students responded that they would attend a community college, 5 responded that they would attend a career training program, and 3 responded that they would work before attending college or a career training program (graph can be found in appendix B).

To find out if the information received was important and useful the students were asked to rank importance and usefulness on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 indicating not important/useful and 5

indicating very important/useful). The results revealed that 73.3 percent of students believed that the information was important or very important and 73.3 percent indicated that the information was useful or very useful (charts can be found in appendix C). Students were asked if they were interested in a virtual one on one appointment and 7 students responded yes. Interested students were contacted via email. However, none of the students responded to the email which resulted in zero one on one appointments.

### **Conclusion & Recommendations**

Post-secondary information and resources should be made available to students regardless of the school they attend. Students in non-traditional high schools like those in regular high schools aspire to further their education. Students in alternative schools are often misperceived and thought of as students who do not have higher education goals which is not necessarily true. The results imply that students in alternative schools are interested and have goals of continuing their education whether it be at a community college or a career training program. More than half of the students are considered first-generation students. Although their parents motivate them to attend college, parental guidance and assistance may not be available as parents of first-generation students tend to be unfamiliar with post-secondary information. One of the goals of the project was to motivate at least five students to complete the financial aid application however timing and student participation did not allow for such results to be acquired. Students at San Andreas Continuation High School, Pinnacles Community School, and Santa Ana Opportunity School must have access to higher education information as many may be considering or have plans of furthering their education. This project provided students with a brief overview of postsecondary education and financial aid however a one-time video is not

enough to prepare and effectively guide students in their higher education journey. To effectively assist students and their transitions into a post-secondary institution, students must continue to receive post-secondary education information and support through videos, in-class presentations, or virtual workshops.

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### Appendix A

#### Scope of Work

Activities	Deliverables	Timeline/Deadlines	Supporting Staff
Develop pre/post-Survey Questions	Survey (Google form)	September 18, 2020	Margie, Pedro
Send mentors pre/post-survey questions for revision and approval	Email	Send out September 21, 2020	Margie, Pedro
Created post-survey. (Combined pre and post questions)	Survey (google form)	By October 19, 2020	Margie, Pedro
Send mentors post-survey form for revision and approval	Email	Send October 21, 2020	Margie, Pedro
Draft introduction email and send to mentors for revision. An email will be sent to students/school staff to introduce myself and the capstone project.	Email	October 23, 2020	Margie, Pedro
Create PowerPoint: Post-Secondary Education and Financial Aid	Presentation material	By October 9, 2020	
Provide mentors with PowerPoint for revision and approval	Email	Send out October 21, 2020	Margie, Pedro
Create a pre-recorded presentation: Post-Secondary Education and Financial Aid	Presentation material	By October 25, 2020	Margie, Pedro
Email school staff and attach a link to the pre-recorded presentation along with a link to the post-survey.	Email	On October 28, 2020	School staff, Margie, Pedro,
Assess post-surveys and record the total number of views that the presentation has.	Summary of responses	November 9, 2020	

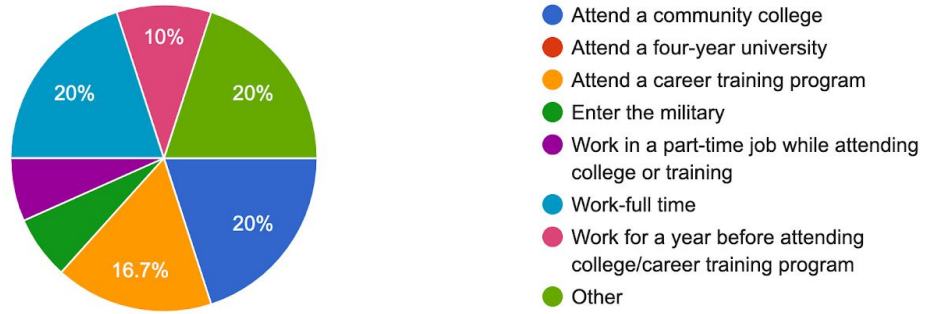


Reach out to students who are interested in having one-on-one appointments (*based on responses from the survey)	Virtual appointments with students	November 9, 2020 - November 13, 2020	Elena
Create a contact log to keep track of one-on-one meetings with students. (*the meeting can be via phone call, Google Meets, email)	Record meetings	November 9, 2020	
Assess the effectiveness of virtual one-on-one meetings	Summary of meetings	Mid-November - Early December	
Zoom meeting to discuss the project	Video distribution	October 2, 2020	Margie, Pedro, Elena
The email was sent out to check-in on the approval of student emails or the possibility of making the video a class assignment	Email	October 21, 2020	Margie, Pedro, Elena
Approval of making the video/survey an extra credit class assignment	Email	October 23, 2020	Elena
Video, survey, and PDF were posted on Google classroom	Material distribution	October 28, 2020	Elena, Teachers
Survey end date	Survey (Google form)	On November 9, 2020	Elena, Teachers

**Appendix B**

Q11. What do you plan to do after high school?

30 responses

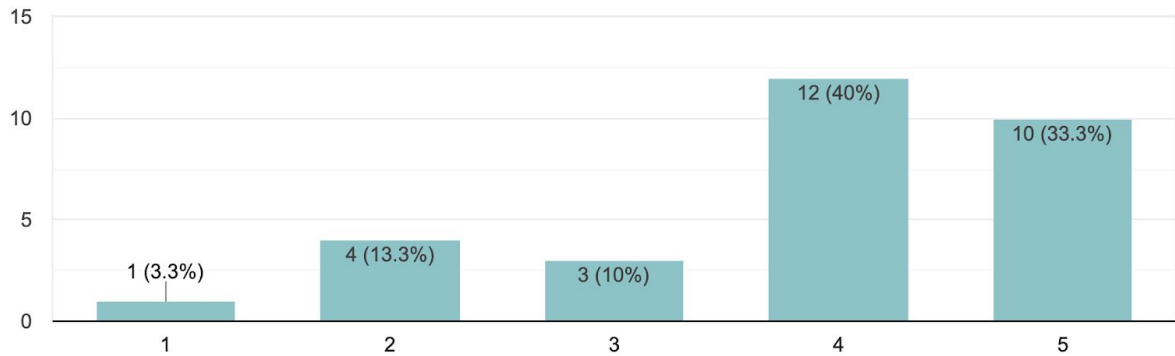


\* enter military: 6.7% | work in a part-time job while attending college or training: 6.7%

**Appendix C**

Q7. How important was the information on the video?

30 responses



Q8. How useful was the information on the video?

30 responses

