

Is there a divide in college readiness?

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It wasn't until my junior year of high school that I realized college was a thing. As a first-generation Vietnamese American, my family did not grow up instilling in me the hopes to be a Tar Heel born, bred and dead.

I didn't think about post-high school plans, didn't watch "Gilmore Girls" and didn't have plans for college. I believe it was a lot of luck that got me to UNC-Chapel Hill, but I could've just as easily not gotten in.

At Jordan High School, there is a bin in the guidance counselors' office during college application season where each student must file a slip, detailing what schools they have applied to or plan to apply to.

When I was a senior there in 2011, it terrified me to go into that office because I felt surrounded by peers in my AP classes who had planned for college since childhood. I was under the impression that everyone in the school was the same—that I was the only one confused and lost.

But when it came time for me to face that bin, I found that it wasn't as full and brimming as I had expected it to be. Each student was given a designated file, and yet, as I sifted through, file after file was completely empty.

I wondered: were these students getting the help they needed?

The U.S. News & World Report calculates a College Readiness Index by

looking at exam participation rates and percentages of students passing at least one exam. According to their website, Jordan's index number is 43.1, with an AP participation rate of 51 percent for the 2011-2012 school year.

This suggests that, to be "college ready," a student must take AP classes and must do well on the exams.

Darly Gomez, a junior at Jordan who plans on attending a four-year college, said that while she does think that high-level classes help prepare students for university, there is also a tension between students who take AP classes and those who do not.

"People who take AP classes tend to surround themselves with those who are also taking those classes because they think those who take standard classes could help them in any way, if they ever needed something," Gomez said.

But the divide between those who take AP classes and those who don't is only one part of a much larger puzzle as we begin to look at and rethink inequalities in the education system.

Junior at Jordan, Justin Thach, said that he faces a lot of challenges in applying to college because of his family's background.

"My parents have never been to college, so this is a new experience for me," he said. "I try to see my counselors as much as I can, but it can be hard doing most of it on my own."

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 45.1 percent of people older than 25



have a bachelor's degree or higher in Durham, North Carolina. Like Jordan, this is a reflection of an almost evenly split level of educational achievement.

There are so many questions that arise from these statistics, and so many questions that arise for students who find themselves unprepared to face what comes after high school.

How does socioeconomic status affect how a student does in high school? How prepared are they for college?

Even four years down the road, I look back on my high school experience and wonder what made the difference for me—and what could have made the difference for others.

