

IB OR SACE?
AN INVESTIGATION INTO
STUDENT COURSE CHOICE AT THE
SENIOR SECONDARY LEVEL
IN AN ADELAIDE SCHOOL

MEREDITH COLEMAN, B.A.(Hons.), Dip. Ed., M. Ed. Studies

A portfolio presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of
the degree of Doctor of Education in the School of Education of
The University of Adelaide,
December 2009.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents	ii
List of Tables and Figures.....	iii
List of Appendices	vii
Glossary	viii
Abstract	ix
Declaration	x
Acknowledgements	xi
Introduction to the Portfolio: IB or SACE?	1
Contents for the Introduction	2
Project 1: Deciding for the Future: Year 10 Survey	44
Contents for Project 1	45
Project 2: Coping with the Present Decision: Year 11 and 12 Studies	131
Contents for Project 2	132
Project 3: Evaluating the Past Decision: A Retrospective Study of 1999 Alumni	186
Contents for Project 3	187
Conclusions to the Portfolio: Satisfying the ‘Customers’ in Senior Schooling	268
Contents for the Conclusions	269
Appendices	287
Bibliography	319

ERRATUM: page 68, line2

'cannot'

should be

'should not'

TABLES and FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

Table 1	IB AND SACE LEARNER CHARACTERISTICS	28
Figure 1	THE EXTENDED ESSAY, TOK AND CAS COMPONENTS OF THE IBDP.....	14
Figure 2	IBDP CURRICULUM.....	15
Figure 3	IBDP ASSESSMENT.....	16
Figure 4	SACE SUMMARY	23

PROJECT ONE

Figure i.1	A SNAPSHOT OF TYPICAL IB/SACE STORYLINES TO BE FOUND IN THE MEDIA.....	56
Figure i.2	OVERALL BREAKDOWN OF STUDENT CHOICE REGARDING IB and SACE	60
Figure i.3	STUDENT ATTENDANCE AT THE COURSE INFORMATION NIGHT	61
Figure i.4	PARENT ATTENDANCE AT COURSE INFORMATION NIGHT.....	62
Figure i.5a	STUDENTS WHO HAVE READ THE YEAR 10 COURSE HANDBOOK	63
Figure i.5b	STUDENTS WHO READ THE YEAR 10 COURSE HANDBOOK, BY COURSE SELECTION	64
Figure i.6	CONSULTATION WITH THE HEAD OF HOUSE	64
Figure i.7	HEAD OF HOUSE INFLUENCE OVER CHOICE	65
Figure i.8	INFLUENCE OF THE HEAD OF HOUSE	67
Figure i.9	CONSULTATION WITH THE CAREER COUNSELLOR.....	68
Figure i.10	STUDENTS WHO CONSULTED WITH CURRENT IB/SACE STUDENTS	70
Figure i.11	FATHER'S INFLUENCE OVER CHOICE.....	73
Figure i.12	MOTHER'S INFLUENCE OVER CHOICE	74
Figure i.13	COMPARISON OF PARENTAL INFLUENCE BY GENDER, IN PERCENTAGE TERMS.....	75
Figure i.14	SIBLINGS WHO HAVE COMPLETED YEAR 12	76
Figure i.15	SIBLING INFLUENCE OVER CHOICE	77
Figure i.16	CLOSEST FRIENDS DOING THE SAME COURSE.....	79
Figure i.17	FRIENDS' INFLUENCE OVER CHOICE.....	80
Figure i.18	MEDIA INFLUENCE OVER CHOICE.....	81
Figure i.19a	ASSISTANCE OF COURSE CHOICE IN FUTURE CAREER.....	82

TABLES and FIGURES continued

Figure i.19b	SACE/IB DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES FROM Figure i.19a	82
Figure i.20	STUDENT INTENTION TO UNDERTAKE TERTIARY STUDY	83
Figure i.21	STUDENT INTENTION FOR FUTURE STUDY IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA	84
Figure i.22	COURSE CHOICE RELATED TO FUTURE STUDY NEEDS	86
Figure i.23	DISTRIBUTION OF BLANK RESPONSES THROUGHOUT PASTORAL CARE GROUPS	88
Figure i.24	DISTRIBUTION OF 'NO/NONE' RESPONSES THROUGHOUT THE PASTORAL CARE GROUPS	89
Figure i.25	SUMMARY OF THE BLANK AND 'NO'/'NONE' RESPONSES.....	118
Figure i.26	RESPONSES THAT IDENTIFIED A SINGLE FACTOR AFFECTING CHOICE.....	119
Figure i.27	RESPONSES THAT IDENTIFIED MULTIPLE FACTORS AFFECTING CHOICE	120

PROJECT TWO

Table ii.1	ELEMENTS THAT COMPRISE THE LONGITUDINAL STUDY	142
Figure ii.1	OVERVIEW OF RESPONSES TO 2002 RESULTS.....	151
Figure ii.2	EVALUATION OF THE FIRST YEAR: GENERAL EXPECTATIONS	154
Figure ii.3	EVALUATION OF THE FIRST YEAR: SUBJECT EXPECTATIONS.....	155
Figure ii.4	EVALUATION OF THE FIRST YEAR: CAREER EXPECTATIONS	156
Figure ii.5	EVALUATION OF THE FIRST YEAR: EXAM EXPECTATIONS	157
Figure ii.6	EVALUATION OF THE FIRST YEAR: FRIENDSHIP EXPECTATIONS	158
Figure ii.7	EVALUATION OF THE FIRST YEAR: WORKLOAD EXPECTATIONS	161
Figure ii.8	VIEWS ON THE ALTERNATE COURSE	162
Figure ii.9	COMMENTS ON ADVICE ON CHOSEN COURSE	164
Figure ii.10	COMPILATION OF RESPONSES ON YEAR 12 COURSE ASSESSMENT	172
Figure ii.11	COMPILATION OF RESPONSES ON YEAR 12 SELF-ASSESSMENT OF ACADEMIC PROGRESS.....	174
Figure ii.12	COMPILATION OF RESPONSES ABOUT EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES	176
Figure ii.13	COMPILATION OF RESPONSES ABOUT FUTURE ASPIRATIONS.....	178
Figure ii.14	COMPILATION OF RESPONSES ABOUT OLDER STUDENTS AS ADVISORS	179

TABLES and FIGURES continued

PROJECT THREE

Table iii.1a	STUDENT ATTENDANCE AT THE 1997 COURSE INFORMATION NIGHT	197
Table iii.1b	PARENT ATTENDANCE AT THE 1997 COURSE INFORMATION NIGHT.....	197
Table iii.2	1997 STUDENTS WHO HAD READ COURSE SYLLABI	198
Table iii.3	1997 CONSULTATION WITH THE HEAD OF HOUSE.....	199
Table iii.4	1997 CONSULTATION WITH A CAREER ADVISER	200
Table iii.5	FATHER'S INFLUENCE OVER CHOICE.....	201
Table iii.6	MOTHER'S INFLUENCE OVER CHOICE	201
Table iii.7	COMPARISON OF MOTHER'S AND FATHER'S INFLUENCE	202
Table iii.8	SIBLINGS WHO HAD COMPLETED YEAR 12.....	203
Table iii.9	1997 SIBLING INFLUENCE OVER CHOICE	204
Table iii.10	1997 STUDENTS WHO CONSULTED WITH OTHER STUDENTS	205
Table iii.11	1997 CLOSEST FRIENDS DOING THE SAME COURSE	206
Table iii.12	1997 FRIENDS' INFLUENCE OVER COURSE	207
Table iii.13	1997 MEDIA INFLUENCE OVER CHOICE	208
Table iii.14	THE 1997 CHOICE AS A PREREQUISITE FOR FUTURE PLANS.....	209
Table iii.15	1997 STUDENT INTENTION TO UNDERTAKE TERTIARY STUDY	210
Table iii.16	1997 INTENTION FOR FUTURE STUDY IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA	211
Table iii.17	WAS THE 1997 COURSE CHOICE DIRECTED BY FUTURE STUDY NEEDS?	211
Table iii.18	COMPARATIVE GUIDE TO TER CONVERSION RATES IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA	215
Table iii.19	CORRELATION OF FACTORS AFFECTING COURSE CHOICE WITH DEGREE OF INFLUENCE: IB RESPONDENTS.....	216
Table iii.20	CORRELATION OF FACTORS AFFECTING COURSE CHOICE WITH DEGREE OF INFLUENCE: SACE RESPONDENTS	219
Table iii.21	IB AND SACE WORD COUNT COMPARISON	264
Figure iii.1	IB STUDENTS' RESPONSES ON COMMENTS ABOUT THE TWO COURSES	213
Figure iii.2	SACE STUDENTS' RESPONSES ON COMMENTS ABOUT THE TWO COURSES..	217
Figure iii.3	REFLECTIONS ON USEFUL ADVICE RECEIVED WHEN CHOOSING A COURSE .	221

TABLES and FIGURES continued

Figure iii.4	REFLECTIONS ON ADVICE THAT COULD HAVE BEEN USEFUL WHEN CHOOSING A COURSE	223
Figure iii.5	SUBJECT CHOICES OF SACE AND IB STUDENTS	225
Figure iii.6	UNIVERSITY OF ADELAIDE, BONUS POINT SCHEME	226
Figure iii.7a	RELATIVELY EASY TRANSITION BETWEEN SECONDARY AND TERTIARY COURSES	229
Figure iii.7b	MIXED TRANSITION BETWEEN SECONDARY AND TERTIARY COURSES	230
Figure iii.7c	DIFFICULT TRANSITION BETWEEN SECONDARY AND TERTIARY COURSES.....	231
Figure iii.8	POST-SECONDARY PATHWAYS FOR IB RESPONDENTS.....	233
Figure iii.9	POST-SECONDARY PATHWAYS FOR SACE RESPONDENTS	235
Figure iii.10a	IDENTIFICATION OF SKILLS GAINED FROM SACE RESPONDENTS	237
Figure iii.10b	IDENTIFICATION OF SKILLS GAINED FROM IB RESPONDENTS	238
Figure iii.10c	COMPILATION OF SPECIFIC SKILLS IDENTIFIED BY STUDENTS	239
Figure iii.11	ELEMENTS MOST ENJOYED IN THE SACE/IB COURSES	242
Figure iii.12	ELEMENTS LEAST ENJOYED IN THE SACE/IB COURSES	245
Figure iii.13	SACE RESPONSES TO QUOTATION a	248
Figure iii.14	SACE RESPONSES TO QUOTATION b	249
Figure iii.15	SACE RESPONSES TO QUOTATION c	250
Figure iii.16	SACE RESPONSES TO QUOTATION d	251
Figure iii.17	SACE RESPONSES TO QUOTATION e	252
Figure iii.18	SACE RESPONSES TO QUOTATION f.....	253
Figure iii.19	IB RESPONSES TO QUOTATION a.....	254
Figure iii.20	IB RESPONSES TO QUOTATION b.....	256
Figure iii.21	IB RESPONSES TO QUOTATION c.....	257
Figure iii.22	IB RESPONSES TO QUOTATION d.....	259
Figure iii.23	IB RESPONSES TO QUOTATION e.....	261
Figure iii.24	IB RESPONSES TO QUOTATION f.....	262

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A	Permission letter – 2002.....	287
APPENDIX B	Year 10 Survey – 2002.....	288
APPENDIX C	Headmaster A’s Letter – 2001	292
APPENDIX D	Year 11 Study – 2003.....	293
APPENDIX E	Year 12 Study – 2004.....	296
APPENDIX F	IB/SACE Letter for Alumni Survey.....	299
APPENDIX G	IB Alumni Survey – 2007	300
APPENDIX H	SACE Alumni Survey – 2007	308
APPENDIX I	IB Learner Profile, IBO website – 2009	316
APPENDIX J	SACE Student Qualities, SACE website – 2009	317
APPENDIX K	Excerpt from Headmaster B’s Newsletter – 2009.....	318

GLOSSARY

The terms below are described in greater detail when introduced in a relevant context.

CAS	Creativity, Action and Service. A compulsory requirement of the IBDP. At the time of the research, students had to document that they had spent 50 hours each on a series of activities that involved creativity, for example, the arts; action, for example, sports and service, for example, community volunteer projects.
EE	The Extended Essay is a compulsory component of the IBDP, a piece of individual research demonstrating an independent, supervised study to produce a 4,000 word paper on a topic chosen by the student.
IB	International Baccalaureate
IB-DP	International Baccalaureate- Diploma Programme (ages16-19)
IB-MYP	International Baccalaureate-Middle Years Programme (ages11-16)
IB-PYP	International Baccalaureate- Primary Years Programme (ages3-12)
Focus School	The school at which this study was carried out.
Head of House	The staff member in charge of a House, a pastoral care group which incorporates students from all secondary year levels at the Focus School.
HESS	A Higher Education Selection Subject is a SACE Stage 2 subject acceptable for university admission. (HESS general subjects were formerly known as PES and PAS, Hess Restricted subjects = SAS).
PES/PAS/SAS	Subjects in SACE were given these terms depending on how they were assessed; Publicly Examined Subjects, Publicly Assessed Subjects or School Assessed Subjects.
Post-compulsory Schooling	During the time of the research, the compulsory age for attending school was 16 (usually denoting Years 11&12). New legislation passed in 2007, meant that from the beginning of 2009 the compulsory age was increased to 17.
Reception - Years 11&12	The entry point for students starting their formal primary education, around five years of age. Successive years are numbered after that; Year 1, Year 2 and so on: the final 2 years are Year 11&12.
SACE	The South Australian Certificate of Education.
SL/HL IB Subjects	Subjects in the IBDP are designated Standard or Higher level. The latter require more content.
SSABSA	The Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia, now the SACE board (as of July 2008).
TER	Tertiary Entrance Ranking. In South Australia, tertiary institutions use a tertiary entrance rank score to assist the selection process of students into courses. This score is calculated from the student's SACE or IB year 12 results.
TOK	Theory of Knowledge. This is a compulsory IBDP course that is an interdisciplinary inquiry into the complexity of knowledge. It involves a study of different ways of knowing and the nature of evidence.

ABSTRACT

This portfolio is an investigation of the process of students' decision-making in choosing between two courses, the South Australian Certificate of Education (a local credential) and the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme, in the final two years of their senior schooling. This investigation was carried out at an independent school for boys in Adelaide between 2001 and 2009.

The aim of the investigation was threefold: to establish what factors were affecting the course choice of the Focus School's students; to examine how these students as „customers“ articulated the risks involved in this decision; and to gain a student-based appraisal of the two course policy.

Three separate projects made up the research portfolio, entitled „Deciding for the Future“, „Coping with the Present Decision“ and „Evaluating the Past Decision“. The first was an inquiry by survey of 116 Year 10 students about to embark on their chosen course. The second examined the responses from two surveys administered to a subset (17) of the above students as they studied their chosen course in Year 11 and Year 12. The third was the analysis of survey material from 20 former students about their chosen course and their subsequent directions since leaving school ten years earlier. The data, collected from qualitative research questionnaires that were a combination of closed and open-ended questions, were then analysed thematically.

The findings indicated that their course choice was a complex and highly individual process that could be the result of competing forces such as personal likes and dislikes, short and long term ambitions and pragmatic and aesthetic motivations. Students could be interpreted as customers shopping for a product and weighing up how to manage the risks in an educational marketplace. It was hoped that, from these findings, the school community would have a deeper understanding of the decision-making processes which would lead to better support for students and others who were involved in such a decision.

The data analysis also demonstrated some important differences in long term outcomes for the students doing each course; as well as a degree of customer satisfaction with what the choice of courses offered them.

DECLARATION

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

Signed.....Date:.....

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The material contained in this portfolio is the sum of many contributors, all of whom were very generous with their practical and emotional support and assistance.

I wish to thank the Focus School who, throughout my endeavours, has offered any backing that I have needed in terms of administrative, clerical and financial help, so willingly and efficiently. I am indebted to the several Headmasters¹ who presided over the time of the research; each saw fit to encourage and endorse my efforts. To the number of teachers and parents whose opinions and time I sought along the way, my gratitude. Finally, to the student body, whose valued responses, fruitful, eclectic and insightful, were given so munificently and actively, my sincerest appreciation.

I wish to thank members of the University of Adelaide, School of Education. The office staff, academic staff and the personalities in the post-graduate room have all made the process of production an enjoyable task. I am indebted, in particular, to the advice and suggestions of my co-supervisors, the late Professor Kevin Marjoribanks and latterly, Dr. Linda Westphalen. Their rigour, scholarship and professional guidance, delivered with such grace and good humour, have challenged and invigorated my learning. I am profoundly indebted to Dr Margaret Secombe, my principal supervisor, for the energy and interest she has shown in my work, not only in this piece of research but since she tutored me during my teacher training in 1979. Her mentorship throughout this time has encouraged me to reflect upon my classroom practice, to seek to inform my pedagogy from the evidence of contemporary research and to undertake my own academic investigations in my development as a teacher.

In conclusion, I wish to thank my family; my parents who inspired in me a love of learning by encouraging my curiosity, my husband, Mark who has always been a source of inspiration and support, and to my children, Hilary and Patrick. It is always a privilege to learn from one's elders, but what unimagined inspiration comes from learning from one's own offspring and the younger generation.

¹ The term Headmaster is the official title of the incumbent Principal at the Focus School. It shall be adhered to throughout this research.