

Academic Atmosphere



BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE



STUDENT BODY COUNCIL
Lowell High School's Student Government

MARCH 3, 2011

Outline



- The Issue at Hand
- Evidence of the Issue
 - Quotes
- Potential Causes of the Issue
 - Suggested Approaches
 - Questions / Comments

The Issue at Hand



- We, the officers of the Student Body Council, are meeting with you today to raise awareness (which we hope will consequently foment change) of what we see as a growing social and academic issue at Lowell: the shift from an encouraging and motivating environment to something much more competitive and antagonistic.

The Issue at Hand



- The competitive, high-stress environment at Lowell gives the impression that academic excellence is the sole way to excel in college and in life – which is not true.
- The focus now is getting good grades alone rather than polishing out-of-classroom talents and interests or even learning in general.

The Issue at Hand



- Lowell's competitive atmosphere is essential to Lowell's environment, but Lowell is competitive in the "wrong" way. We find the values and skills emphasized in the peer community are unhealthy.

The Issue at Hand



- These values are:
 - Cramming is the most efficient way to succeed on tests, because the letter grade is much more important than learning the material.
 - Sleep is not that important. It takes away time from doing homework.
 - Taking certain classes and joining certain extracurriculars will get you into an amazing (Ivy League or brand name) school.
 - Skillful cheating can and will get you good grades.

The Issue at Hand



- Ultimately, students are losing sight of the passion for learning.

Evidence of the Issue



- 73% of students found homework to be “busy work.”
- Only 7% of seniors claim to have never copied homework or have cheated on tests
 - Freshmen: 37%
 - Sophomores: 20%
 - Juniors: 15%
 - Seniors: 7%

Evidence of the Issue



11. I have cut class to catch up for homework/tests

	Agree	Disagree
Freshmen	21%	79%
Sophomores	45%	55%
Juniors	55%	45%
Seniors	65%	34%
Total	47%	53%

Evidence of the Issue



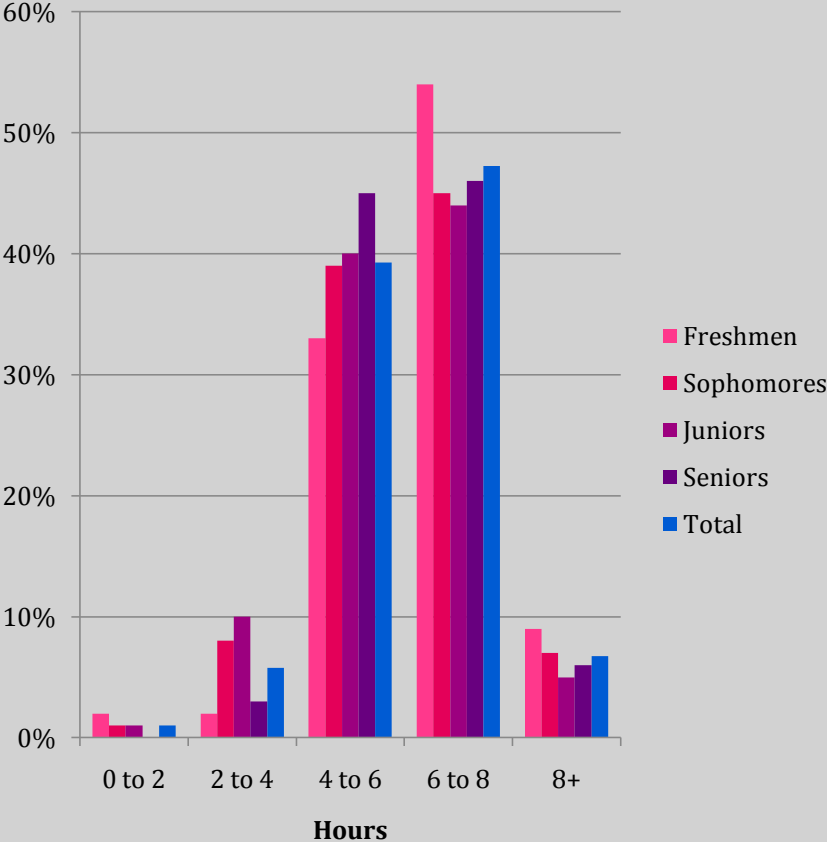
18. Students at Lowell are more interested in

	Learning	Grades	Both	Not Sure
Freshmen	2%	65%	21%	12%
Sophomores	1%	77%	19%	3%
Juniors	1%	83%	11%	4%
Seniors	1%	89%	9%	2%
Total	1%	79%	15%	5%

Evidence of the Issue



Sleep Time



5. I spend __ hours a day sleeping

	0 to 2	2 to 4	4 to 6	6 to 8	8+
9	2%	2%	33%	54%	9%
10	1%	8%	39%	45%	7%
11	1%	10%	40%	44%	5%
12	0%	3%	45%	46%	6%
Total	1%	6%	39%	47%	7%

Quotes



- One administrator said in all her ten years at Lowell, she has never had as many student complaints about stress as she has received this year.
- Two Lowell graduates, now college freshmen at Ivy League schools, advised that taking fewer A.P.s led to their success in the college admissions process. Members of the Lowell Counseling Department have made similar suggestions.

Quotes



- Stanford rejected all 63 Lowell students who applied last year. The admissions officers from Stanford have explicitly stated that the reason they reject Lowell students is because Lowell students have become “A.P. machines.”
- A Lowell sophomore stated, “If people at Lowell spent just 5 minutes talking about something [other than college], I will finally have a smile on my face for once.”

Quotes (Survey)



These quotes were all anonymously written in the free response section of our survey. They are from all grades.

- “We could improve Lowell by being more open minded. Everyone at this school is more interested in grades. Not true learning. I wish there was joy in what I do.”
- “Lack of sleep + high stress + no free mods = a nasty effect I’ll definitely feel 10 years down the line. The administration, district, etc. do not care about the students nearly as much as they claim to or should.”

Quotes (Survey)



- “Lowell and its students only seem smart on paper. There’s more to life than cramming.”
- “I can sum up Lowell in one quote: ‘We have been trained too long to strive and not to enjoy.’ –John Maynard Keynes.”
- “There’s a lot of stress from grades and extra-curriculars that cause unpleasant days at Lowell. Honestly, I get really sad. I’d rather have a good mindset towards school and just be happy.”

Quotes (Survey)



- “I am most stressed about my grades and my GPA because it will affect my transcript when colleges look at it. That is the reason why I resolve to cheating or copying homework...I don't want to feel lower than others. I don't want my grades to define my success.”

Suggested Approaches



Prerequisites

- Bring back prerequisites
 - Fewer people would be able to take A.P. courses
- Social Studies dept offers the most A.P.s but there are no prerequisites
 - As a result, many people who did poorly in A.P. History would not have taken the class in the first place
- Prerequisites would include grades or a test (such as the way chemistry honors placement test works)

Suggested Approaches



Honors Courses

- Bring back more honors courses
 - A.P. U.S. History vs. Honors U.S. History
- People are taking A.P. courses instead of the honors alternative and consequently, taking the A.P. exam in May puts on much unanticipated stress
- All senior courses are either A.P. or regular. Students are forced to choose between a college-level course and the degrading “regular” course.

Suggested Approaches



Mid-Semester Drops

- Student input: “Everyone knows that the first two weeks of a class are hardly representative of the entire semester. If you can’t handle the pressure of the class, transfer out if it’s a required class (like USH), or just drop the class.”

Suggested Approaches



Wellness Center

- Mandatory Wellness visits
- Many students don't have time or the courage to visit the Wellness Center – an amazing resource that all students should experience
- Proposal of one visit a semester – students have to have some sheet signed off and turn it in to registry at the end of the year

Suggested Approaches



Non-Academic 7th Course

- 7th course must be a non-academic course
- This would make motivated students pursue a more creative side
- Example: Nancy quit band after her sophomore year in order to take A.P. Statistics as an elective
 - (She loved A.P. Statistics, but she also missed band!)

Discussion



We posted the trailer to “The Race to Nowhere” and blogged about the issue. We asked for student opinion and here are some of the responses we received.

(You can find all of this on the LSA website, lhsstugov.com)

Discussion



- “Wellness Center upgrade is a must. ... The fact that the Vicci Center has to explain directions ... say[s] something about how hidden and somewhat inconvenient resources are sometimes.”
- “I don’t think expanding the Wellness Center or Peer Resources will help AT ALL. Yes, I’m sometimes a bit depressed, and I’m stressed out. Do I want to talk about it? Will that help me? No, what will help me is a) less homework and b) more sleep.”

Discussion



- “The school and its leaders cannot directly influence the stress level of a student without placing a cap on the amount of homework per night. ”
- “I never would’ve thought of cheating in Middle School, but at Lowell such behavior is not only condoned but accepted. People are not ashamed to cheat.”
- “The grade deflation needs to end, and people need to actually start caring about the students, because that is clearly not happening.”

Discussion



“Another big issue is our [messed] up I-don’t-know-whether-to-be-a-mod-or-block-schedule-so-I-think-I’ll-try-to-do-a-hybrid-of-both-and-not-do-either-well. I know that SBC probs can’t really help with that, but as long as we’re scratching mods then let’s switch to a legitimate block schedule.”

“SBC can’t help with anything. It is not a decision making body nor does it have any power and weight in matters discussed by the admin and the SSC.”

Questions



- Feedback:

Do you have any
questions or comments
for us?

Thank you!