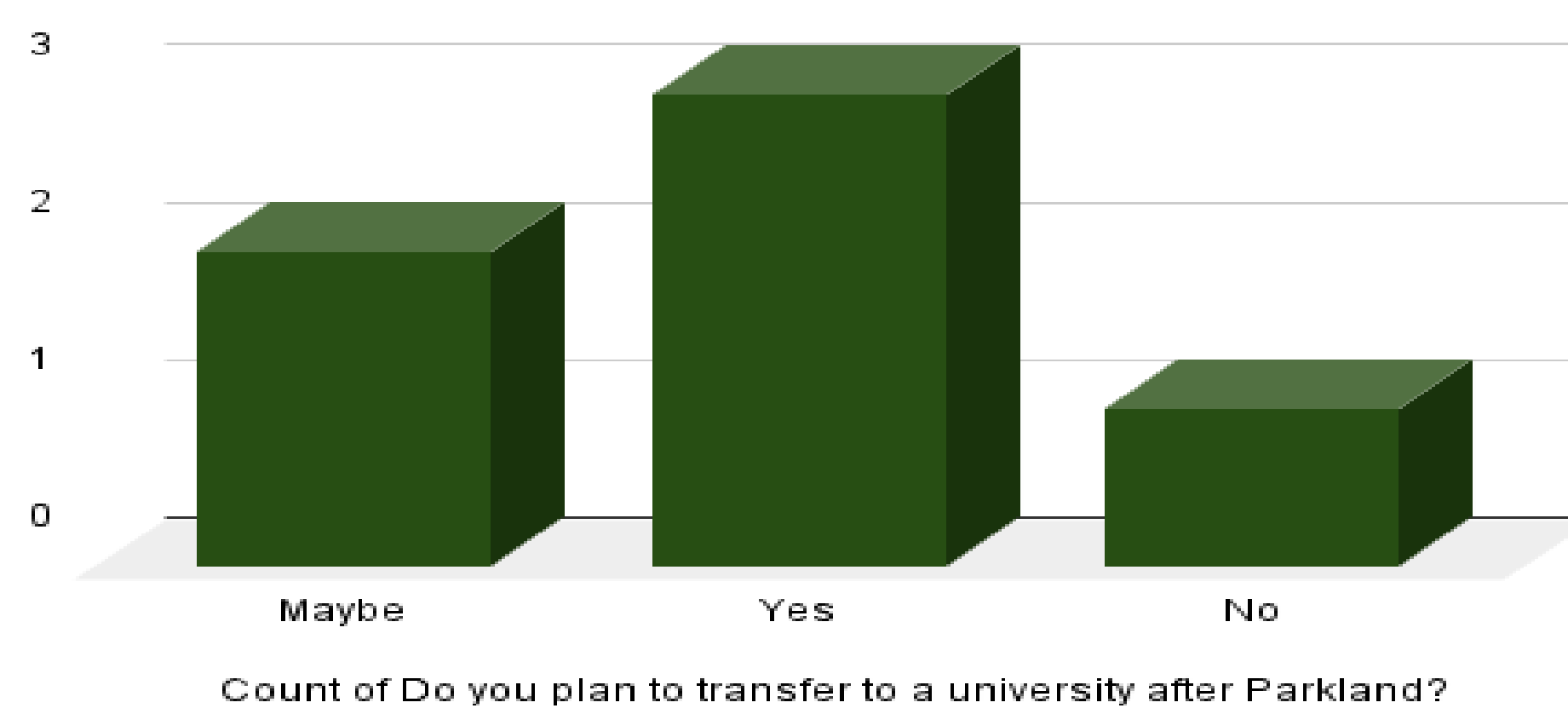


An Ethnography of Factors Leading Students to Choose Parkland

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Do you plan to transfer to a university after Parkland?



Bar graph reflecting the likelihood that students will transfer to universities after Parkland

Introduction

Our research question was focused on why students choose Parkland, a community college, and not a 4-year institution where they can get a bachelors degree if their goal is the college degree. Looking at Parkland's website and at studies on community colleges (Chen 2021) we found that most outsiders looking in would say that the flexibility of a two-year college is one of the most significant advantages. You can enroll in classes that fit into your schedule and you can also generally transfer your credits to a four-year university later if you decide to earn a bachelors degree. We wanted to know if Parkland students agreed with this assessment.



Each year, approximately 1,500 University of Illinois students attend classes at Parkland (source: Parkland College website).



Methods

Our methods of research were an online survey and informal interviews with staff at Admissions at Parkland. We used Google Forms to distribute this survey and gave it to our classmates and friends that attend Parkland.

We asked our survey participants the following questions:

- What is your age and year in school?
- Have you attended any other colleges or universities besides Parkland?
- Are you part of a Parkland program? (Pathways, automotive, etc.)
- Why did you choose Parkland?
- Was Parkland your first choice?
- Rate how important the following was for choosing to attend Parkland (1-5, 1 being lowest)
 - Tuition
 - Location
 - Scholarships
 - Programs / Majors
 - Sports and clubs
 - Campus culture
 - Diversity

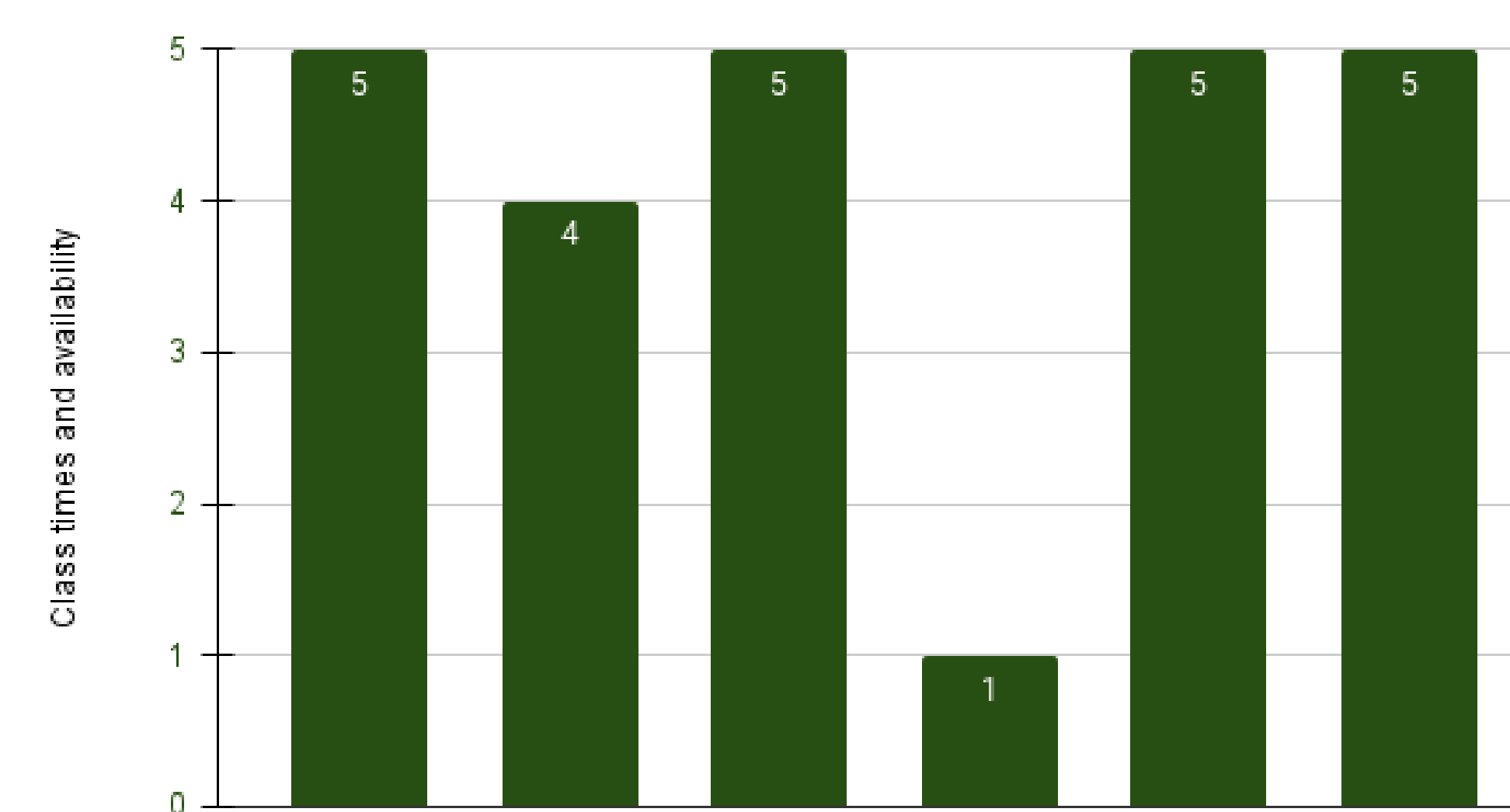
Did you know you wanted to attend Parkland?

- I was pretty sure I wanted to attend community college
- I was deciding between community college and a
- Parkland was not my first choice / a backup option



Pie chart showing the distributions of answers to: "After high school, did you already know that you wanted to attend Parkland or a community college?"

Class times and availability



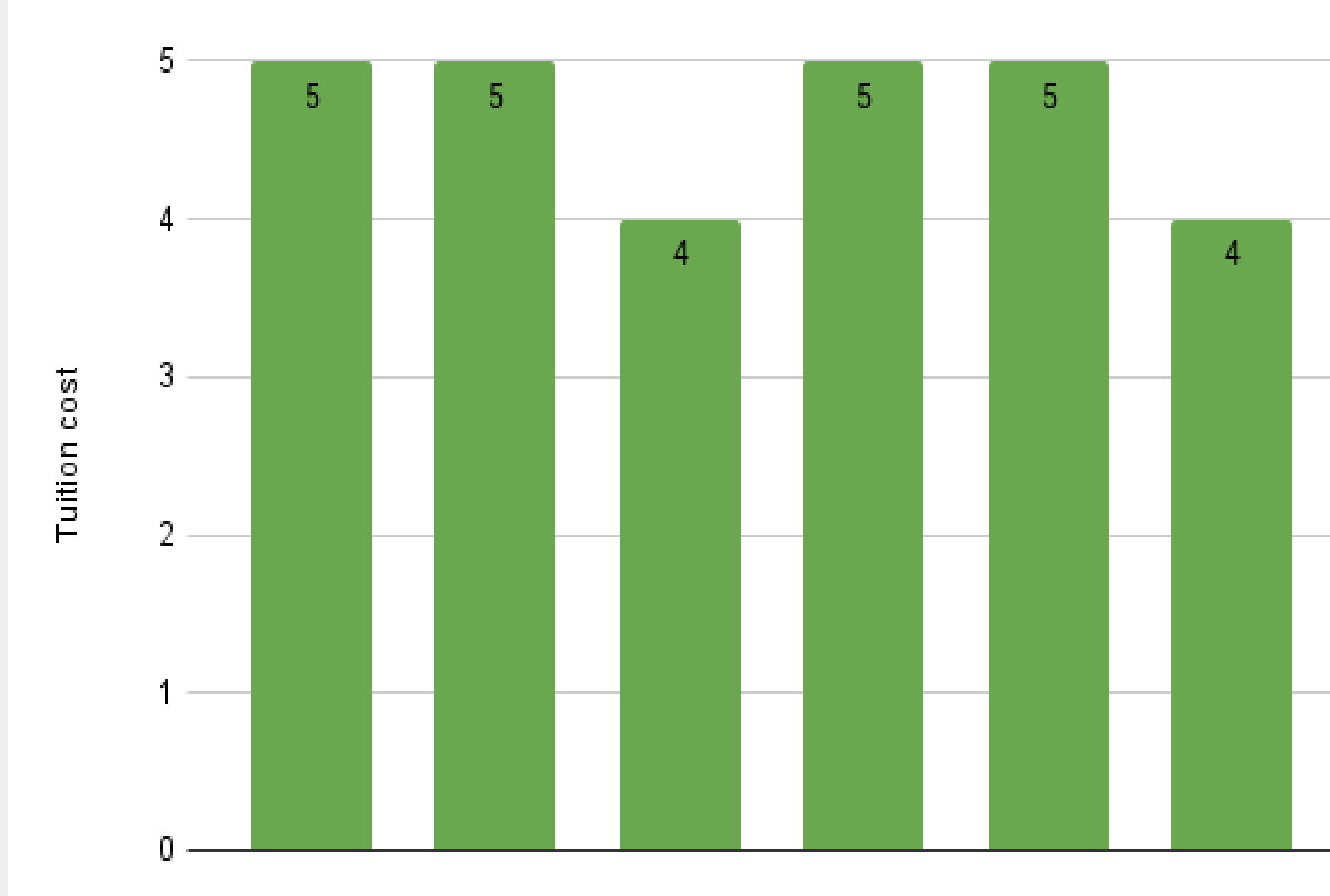
Bar graph showing the distribution of responses to "Was coming to Parkland related to class schedules and availability?"

Results

We were able to gain an understanding of students' decisions to attend Parkland Community College rather than a four-year university through our survey and interviews.

- 50% of those surveyed were fairly certain that they wanted to enroll in a community college. According to 16.7% of respondents, Parkland was not their first option but rather their backup. 33.3% of the people surveyed were considering going to a university rather than a community college.
- Our respondents cited flexible class schedules and availability of classes that transferred to a four-year school as an important reason to attend Parkland. About half were thinking of attending a four-year university instead of Parkland, and low tuition costs and the availability of offerings decided them for Parkland.

Tuition cost



Bar graph displaying the answers to whether coming to Parkland was for the low tuition cost.

Discussion

- ❖ Community colleges offer an inexpensive education. Although community college students can also earn certificates and work training, an Associates degree can be earned in about two years of continuous study and those classes transfer to a four-year school. A lot of students start their general education in community colleges before continuing to a four-year university to complete their bachelor's degrees and we found that many Parkland students follow this path. The top benefits of attending a community college, our respondents agree, are having small class numbers, being affordable, convenient, and having professors who are more interested in teaching and helping.
- ❖ Our data showed that, with some variation, cost and availability of transfer classes are why students choose Parkland. Overall, the data we collected matched our own assumptions about community college as students of Parkland. Ethnography is an inductive research process, where "the researcher seeks to collect evidence without trying to definitely prove or disprove a hypothesis" (Nelson 2020). We consider this ethnographic inductive study a starting point and more data may be needed before reaching a conclusion on this topic.



Another advantage our respondents noted was that class sizes in community colleges are small, with an average of 25 to 35 students.

References

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