

# To university or not to university: That is the aspiration



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## Introduction

**Objective** To describe and distinguish aspired educational levels of rural secondary students who attend an early college high school

**Why?** Forming educational and career aspirations is a complex process involving social, personal, and contextual factors (Lent et al., 1994; Tang et al., 2008). The parts of the process our study focused on are the contributive factors related to students' educational **beliefs** and **performance** and **growth** experiences at school.

**What?** A quantitative approach to describing & distinguishing academic aspirations informed by **Social Cognitive Career Theory** (SCCT; Lent et al., 1994)

**Where?** A rural TX public school district whose mission is to close the generational poverty gap by *eliminating barriers to post-secondary education*

**Who?** n=142 6th-11th grade students @ a rural early college secondary school

## Method

**Discriminant analysis** assessed distinction among two-year, four-year, and graduate degree aspiration groups

Variable		Measurement
Academic Achievement	IV	MAP assessment performance norm-referenced percentile rank in reading at mid-year point
Academic Growth		MAP assessment measurement of aggregate growth in reading over one school semester
Satisfaction with Recent Accomplishments (Self)		Likert scale question on satisfaction of recent accomplishments at school
Perception of School as Contributive to Future Success		Likert scale survey question on belief in ability of school to make contributons to future success
Educational Aspiration	DV	Survey item on belief of level of education expected to earn in the future

## References

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Photo of compass by Martin Land

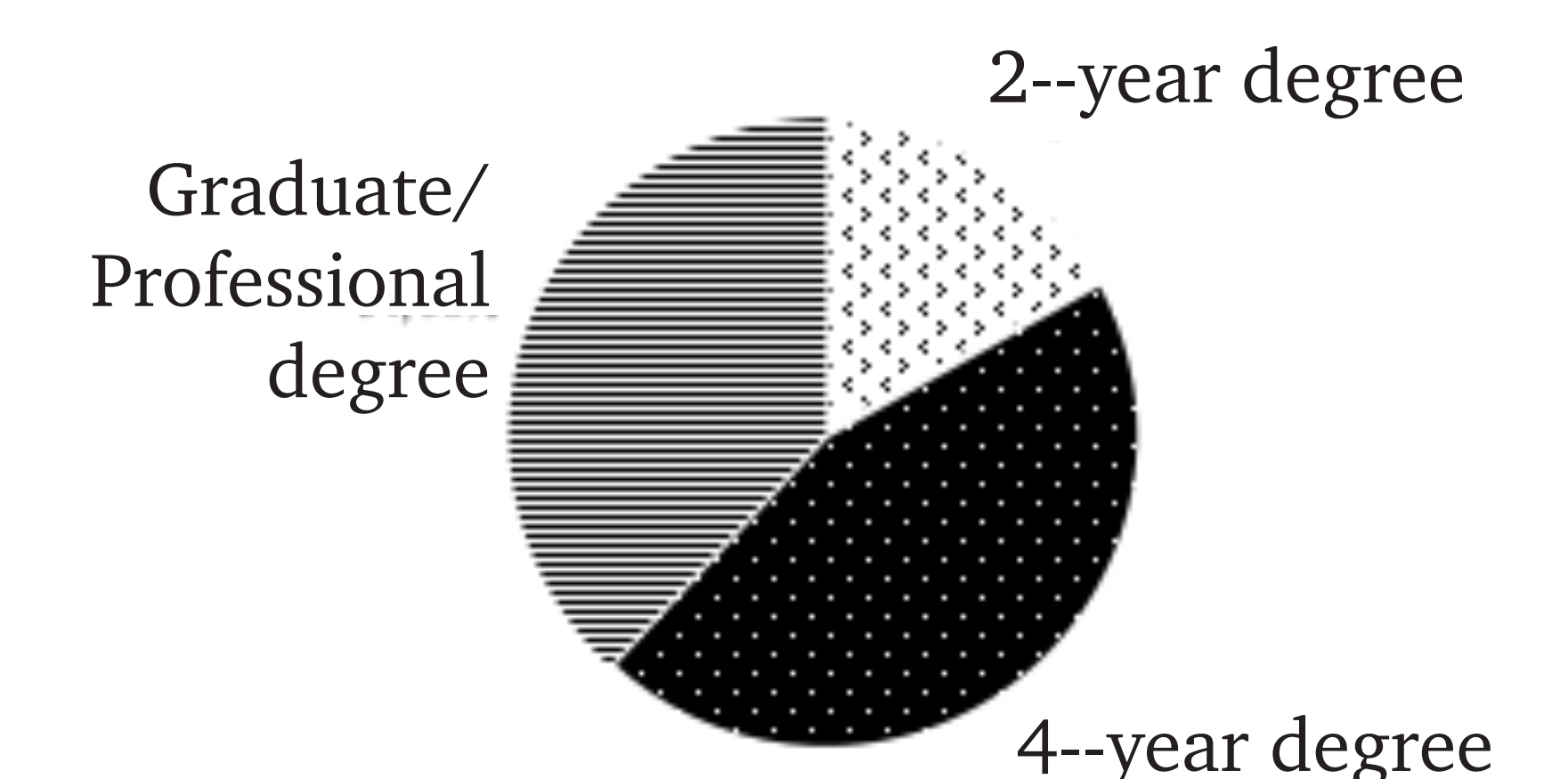
## Results

83% of students aspired to earn at least a four-year degree in their lifetimes.

The 1st function significantly distinguished aspiration groups, although the effect size was small. The model correctly classified 51% of aspiration groups. (Random chance @ 33.3%)

*Academic performance* and *satisfaction with accomplishments* had the most influence in the prediction model.

### Aspired Level of Education



Wilks'  $\lambda = .89$

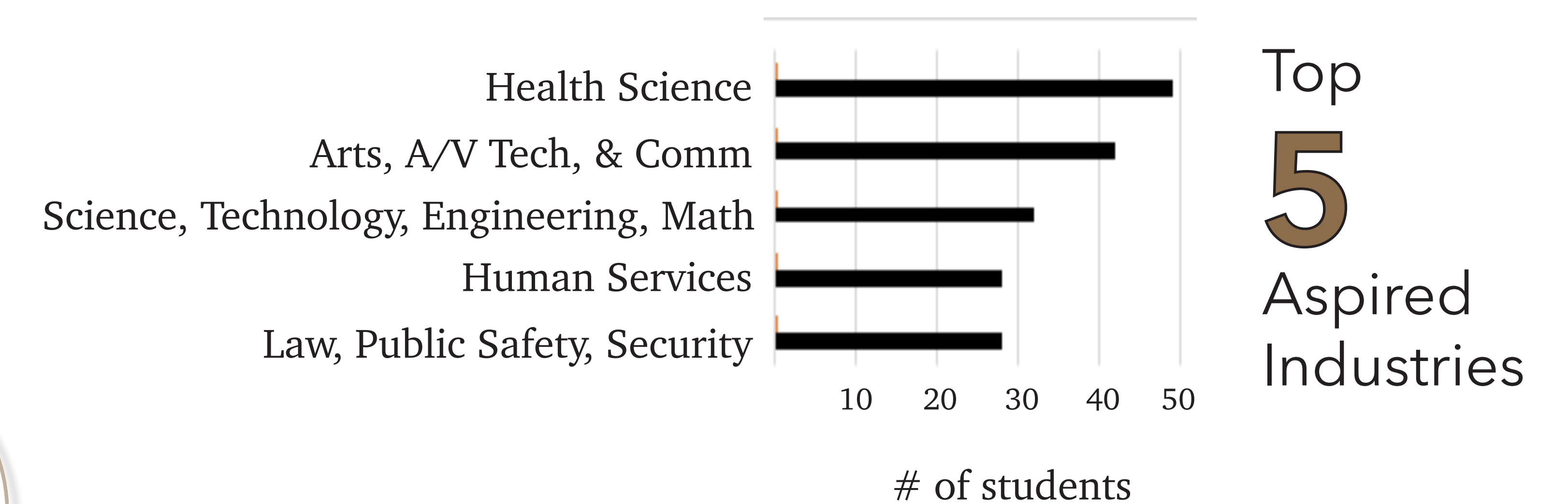
$\chi^2 = 16.78$   
 $p = .033$

Eigenvalue  
.07

Canonical  
Correlation  
.26

Variance  
58%

Effect  
size  
 $r^2 = .07$



### Distinguishing Aspirations

Predictor Variables	Structure	Standardized Canonical Coefficient
	Function 1	
Academic Achievement	.54	.70
Academic Growth	-.23	-.53
Satisfaction with Self	.68	.70
Perception of School	.27	.07

## Conclusion

Students aspire to earn 4+ yr degrees more than rural peers (Tieken, 2016). Although the model significantly predicted distinction, results indicated little practical significance. These results indicate improvement is needed in future research on predicting educational aspirations of rural students.

### Recommendations

- Improve future studies with valid and reliable measures of more clearly defined SCCT constructs.
- Measure psychosocial constructs using dimensionality.
- Investigate effort attribution theories such as growth mindset, grit, and locus of control as factors in educational and career aspiration development.
- The rural school district should continue to monitor and celebrate success and to include key informants, qualitative designs, and more robust measures in future data collection.