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Raquel Jorge Fernandes

Clark University, Rjorgefernandes@clarku.edu

Dela Bernard

Clark University, dbernard@clarku.edu

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Students' Reflections on Highschool Engaged Learning Experiences: What Skills Do They Bring to College?

Raquel Jorge Fernandes '23 & Dela Bernard '23 – (Sponsor: Professor Nancy Budwig & Grad. Student Jimin Lee)



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Introduction

- Contemporary American liberal education has changed in the past years with an increased focus on the capacity to integrate distinct aspects of a person's learning, such as skills and knowledge, and apply that learning to new contexts and real-world problems (Schneider, 2018).
- As Figure 1 shows, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) outlined 4 Essential Learning Outcomes (ELOs), with a particular emphasis on ELO 4 (AAC&U, 2015). Working with member institutions, the AAC&U created the LEAP Challenge to assist schools in designing curricula to meet the new outcome pertaining to Integrative and Applied Learning (Budwig, 2018).
- Students' readiness for college and related skills differs depending on many factors such as their identities, relationships, cultural practices, as well as structural constraints and support (Nasir et al., 2020). Many high schools use an "eligibility" model and neglect areas of student development that support skills related to their readiness for college learning, critical thinking, information literacy, team-work and Integrative and Applied Learning (Conley, 2018).
- Our research is part of a larger study that focuses on students' reflections on their high school engaged learning experiences, we examined two questions:
 - We examined which ELOs students identified that they acquired from completing engaged learning projects in high school and that they perceived will be useful in college.
 - We investigated if their answers varied depending on their parents' educational background.

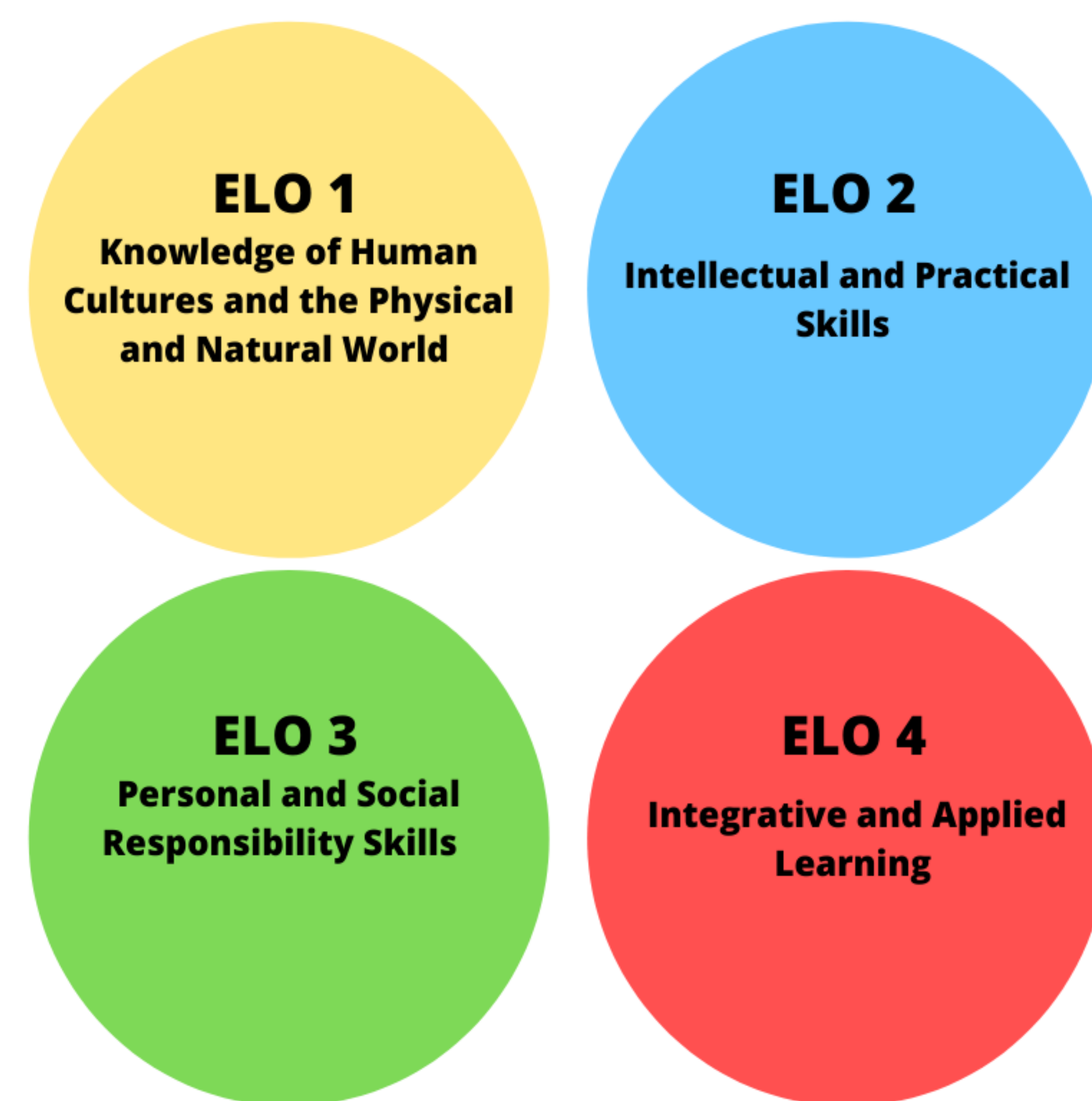


Figure 1: Four Essential Learning Outcomes (ELOs) from the Association of American Colleges and Universities

Methods

- Participants:** As part of a larger study, 228 first year students from four different colleges participating in the LEAP Challenge were surveyed. Of the 228 students, only 196 responded to the open-ended question about skills.
- Data Collection:** Qualtrics surveys containing 24 items were distributed to administrators of the LEAP challenge schools and were circulated to students via an electronic invite. Survey questions included questions on students' experiences with engaged learning and demographic questions.
- Analysis:** We coded 290 responses to the question "What skills acquired from completing...[the aforementioned experience with engaged learning in high school]...do you imagine will be useful to you in college and beyond?" based on the four ELOs from the AAC&U. Some students provided more than one response. Next, we compared responses based on parent education level—below BA (N=117 responses), or BA and above (N=173 responses).
- Inter-rater reliability was assessed. There were 7 coding disagreements (all resolved), resulting in 85% reliability.

Results

- As Figure 2 reveals most first year college students mentioned Intellectual and Practical Skills (ELO 2) followed by Personal and Social Responsibility Skills (ELO 3) when describing their experiences with engaged learning in high school.
- Less than 5% of first year college students mentioned Integrative and Applied Learning (ELO 4) when describing their high school engaged learning experience(s).
- First generation students' answers were no different than students with parents with a B.A. and above. A chi square test of independence showed that there was no significant relationship between students' parents education background and student's beliefs about acquired ELO skills $\chi^2(3, N = 290) = 2.00, p = .57$.

What skills acquired from completing this work do you imagine will be useful to you in college and beyond?

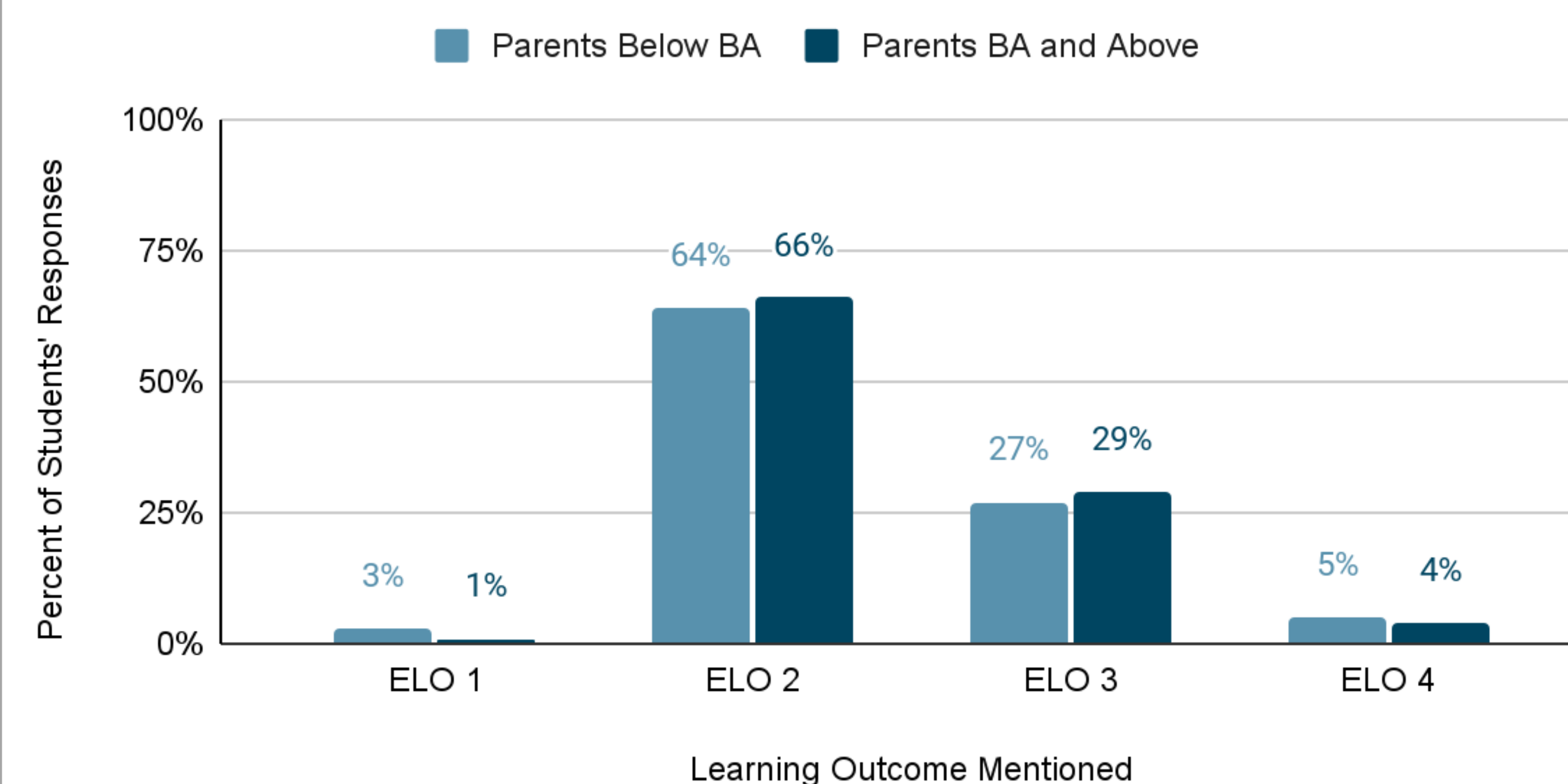


Figure 2: Percent of Students' Responses by Learning Outcome Mentioned and Parent Education Level

Discussion

- Summary:** Regardless of students' parent education background, we found that most answers given by first year college students did not involve Integrative and Applied Learning (ELO 4) and instead focused on Intellectual and Practical Skills (ELO 2) as well as Personal and Social Responsibility Skills (ELO 3), respectively.
- Next Steps:** We've included two recommendations for future research on this topic.
 - We need to further examine how students perceive and describe their experiences and acquired skills in order to better understand why they do not talk about Integrative and Applied Learning (ELO 4). It could be that students have not had Integrative and Applied Learning experiences prior to their entry to college, or even that they do not have the language or skills to identify these instances. This is important to resolve since the LEAP Challenge schools all value and prioritize Integrative and Applied Learning (ELO 4).
 - Further research on effective program models for helping students understand instances of Integrative and Applied Learning could be beneficial for these purposes.
- Implications:** All students seem to be in equal disadvantage identifying instances of Integrative and Applied Learning (ELO 4) when describing their most valuable acquired skills from high school for their college experiences and beyond. It would be reasonable to suggest that schools introduce to students the importance of Integrative and Applied Learning (ELO 4) within their first semester of college to reach this understanding.

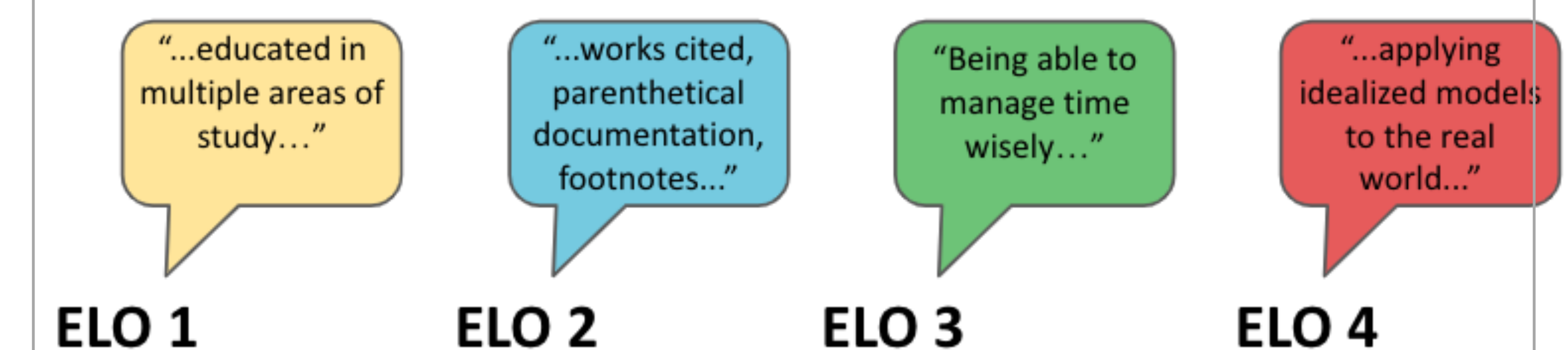


Figure 3: Examples of the Essential Learning Outcome (ELO) Skills Mentioned in Student Responses

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