

Cultural capital is key to preparing for college and getting into a good school

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A study by Kristin Jordan, a doctoral student in Indiana University Bloomington's Department of Sociology, found that students with low-income or minority status do not prepare for college in the same way as their more privileged counterparts, regardless of their academic ability or plans to attend college. The less privileged students are over-represented in community colleges while their counterparts are more likely to attend more selected schools.

Jordan said just taking preparation courses increases the likelihood that someone will attend a more selective [college](#) regardless of his or her final test score. She discussed her study on Sunday at the American Sociological Association 2010 Annual Meeting.

"Greater availability for college preparation and SAT preparation, without having to pay extra hundreds of dollars to get an extra point on the SAT to get in a top college, is the kind of program that would make it more equal for all students," Jordan said.

Background: The definition of cultural capital originally started out as high-status cultural symbols such as going to the theater, but now cultural capital has several other definitions. People possess cultural capital if their parents are college graduates or if they have access to educational resources, meaning that they know how to navigate the educational system. "Their parents are the ones who in elementary and middle school argued for their kids to be in the gifted program; parents that work the system," Jordan said.

Students of middle-class, college-educated parents take advantage of college preparation because they know of its importance through their parents. College preparation activities, such as SAT prep courses, are a vital part of getting into a four-year, moderate to highly selective college. Typically, those who attend [community colleges](#) have less cultural capital, in part because their parents are less likely to be college educated.

"It would be great if everyone had equal access to college preparation programs. It could go a long way toward reducing inequalities in college destinations," Jordan said.

Provided by Indiana University

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