

W

Who are the students who flourish at The Putney School? What are the effects of a Putney School education on students? Are the experiences at Putney life-changing in the ways that we imagine, or in ways that we have not even considered? These are some of the broad questions that have inspired the birth of The Putney School Longitudinal Study.

The brainchild of Judith J. Petry, M.D., the study seeks to learn more about the progressive education provided by The Putney School. Beginning with the entering Class of 2013 this fall, data will be collected from participating students before they arrive at school, and repeated at intervals during their stay at Putney and extending beyond their Putney years.

While working part-time in the Deans Office, Judith noticed that some students never got sick, never had an unexcused absence; while others seemed to be trying to outdo one another with days missed from class. She wondered what the contributing factors were: personality, health behaviors, country of origin? Did the attendance habits persist, and were they an indicator of what happened to the students after they left Putney? She also noticed that Putney graduates tended to stay attached in a variety of ways to the school for many years after graduation; the perfect set-up for a longitudinal study.

This type of study has been used in many settings to investigate correlations between variables over time that might otherwise be missed. No interventions are made, so this is not an experiment,

rather it is an observation of specific variables over many years that are then analyzed statistically to determine if there are correlations that can be identified.

During Project Week this May, Judith and a group of students studying research methods polled the faculty and staff and came up with a wide range of variables that people were interested in looking at over time. Emily Jones wants to know what effects the dorm in which a boarding student lives might have on his or her Putney School experience. Elizabeth St. John wants to know how language studies and foreign travel during Putney School years affect cross-cultural experiences in later life. Ben Freeman wants to know if senior tutorials and exhibitions are in any way predictive of career choices.

Leslie Reed wonders if students who eat breakfast do better academically than those who do not. The questions are endless, the possible data collection limited only by time and the participants' willingness to fill out surveys.

In July, the incoming ninth graders were invited to participate in the study. Those who choose to become involved were assigned a code number which will be their only identifier during the duration of the study. Data security is extremely important to the school and only Dr. Petry and the director will have access to the code. The data will

be reported as a group description, not as individuals, so that participants remain anonymous.

It is our intention to learn as much as possible about what we are doing well and what might be modified to improve the overall experience of Putney School students. We believe this scientific approach will yield fascinating and useful results over many years to come, not only for the benefit of our students, but for all students of progressive education.

What Makes Putney Tick

A LONGITUDINAL STUDY

