The Influence of Other Significant People on a Young Woman’s College Decision

Utah Women and Education Project researchers conducted in-depth research in 2010 to discover why more young women around the state are not attending and graduating from college. Findings show that people are the most important influence on a young woman’s college decision. Previous snapshots presented findings related to the influence of fathers (No. 2), mothers, (No. 3), school counselors and administrators (No. 4), teachers (No. 5), and religious leaders (No. 10). However, researchers discovered that other individuals can be powerful influences as well. Hence, the purpose of this snapshot is to highlight the influence of other significant people on a young woman’s college decision and present the level of influence of these particular stakeholders.

Data were gathered concerning the influence of siblings on the decision of young women to drop out of, graduate from, or not attend college. There was no statistically significant difference when we compared the participant’s college choice with birth order or number of brothers and sisters. This means that, in this sample, the college decision was not linked to the number of siblings in a family or if the participant was born as a first, middle, or last child. These women, however, were more likely to attend if they had sisters and/or brothers who had or were attending college. Conversations about college with siblings focused on the importance of college, expenses, positive and negative experiences, and fun times. Interestingly, the most important link to college attendance and graduation is when siblings reminded them that they needed to be a good example to others by attending college.

**Sample Participant Quotes**

“I learned a lot from my older sister about college; she taught me a lot about determination and goals. She loved college and was going to graduate with her degree regardless of how her life changed. She was married and 8 months pregnant when she was able to graduate and get that diploma!”

“My biggest example is my grandma; when she was 70 she wanted to learn a new language so she took Spanish at the local college until she could speak it fluently.”

“My aunt was 40 when she went back to college, and she proved to me that it is never too late to get your education.”

“They [my friends] never really encouraged me to go. It was more like only the really, really smart kids were going to college.”

“My girlfriends all wanted to marry someone that went to college, but it wasn’t as big of a deal to attend ourselves.”

**Participant Demographics**

- 245 females; 18-32 year-olds
- 89.9% White; 80.4% LDS
- 44.1% married
- 16 counties, 56.2% from Salt Lake and Utah counties

Visit www.uvu.edu/wep for additional information about the research study.
Other Findings

We provided a list of people in our survey and asked the young women to whom they talked to when they had questions about college. We found that friends/peers (77%), parents (72%), and counselors (50%) were the top three.

**Questions about College: Who Do They Ask?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends/Peers* (77%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents* (72%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Counselors (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings (41%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatives (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers* (38%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Church Leaders* (34%)</td>
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<td>Neighbors (16%)</td>
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**GRAPH HIGHLIGHTS**

- Young women who said they asked questions to parents and church leaders were more likely (in predictive statistics) to attend and graduate from college.
- Participants who answered that they went to 1) parents, 2) church leaders, 3) friends/peers, 4) teachers, and 5) relatives were more likely to complete college preparation activities (see Snapshot No. 6) before high school graduation.
- Although asking questions of counselors, siblings, relatives, and neighbors did not link statistically to college attendance and graduation, other findings did confirm their influence to be important.

**OTHER FINDINGS**

- Participants who said that they had no influence from others beyond the initial people studied (e.g., parents, siblings, relatives, local church leaders, school counselors, and teachers) were significantly less likely to attend college and graduate. It seems that in addition to positive influences from the core support system, young women also benefit from conversations and encouragement from employers, neighbors, church/community members, family friends, and others.
- Influence from employers, neighbors, church/community members, and family friends is significantly linked to involvement of a young woman in college preparation activities as well as attendance in and graduation from college.
- The five strongest predictors of young women doing college preparation activities include receiving assistance and/or encouragement from mothers, fathers, school counselors, friends, and local church leaders.
- The four strongest predictors of young women getting to college and graduating include receiving assistance and/or encouragement from local church leaders, teachers, friends, and parents.

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