



Introduction: Utah Women and Education Research Snapshots

Setting the Stage

The purpose of the two-year (2009-2011) Utah Women and Education Project (UWEP) was to lead efforts within the state to understand and then motivate more young women to enter and stay in school long enough to obtain college degrees. Utah Women and Education Project researchers conducted in-depth research in 2010 to discover why more young women around the state were not attending and graduating from college. Twelve Research Snapshots were written to help disseminate the findings to Utah residents. They were written especially for girls, women, and those who influence them (e.g., parents; guidance counselors; teachers; school administrators; siblings; relatives; neighbors; church leaders; government leaders and legislators; nonprofit leaders and employers; and higher education faculty, staff, and administrators). This introduction provides background information for the study.

Background

Participants for this research were recruited using a variety of methods: referrals (from college/university employees all over the state), postcards (Community Action; DWS, LDS Employment Center, WIC), online ads (Daily Herald, Craigslist, KSL, Survey Monkey), blogs, cold calls from institutional lists, and the UVU homepage.

The instrument for the study included both a quantitative survey and an open-ended qualitative portion. Participants spent between 45 minutes to three hours to complete both on-line portions, with the average time about 90 minutes. Many participants told us they had never thought so deeply about why they made the choices they made regarding college and what influenced their related decisions.

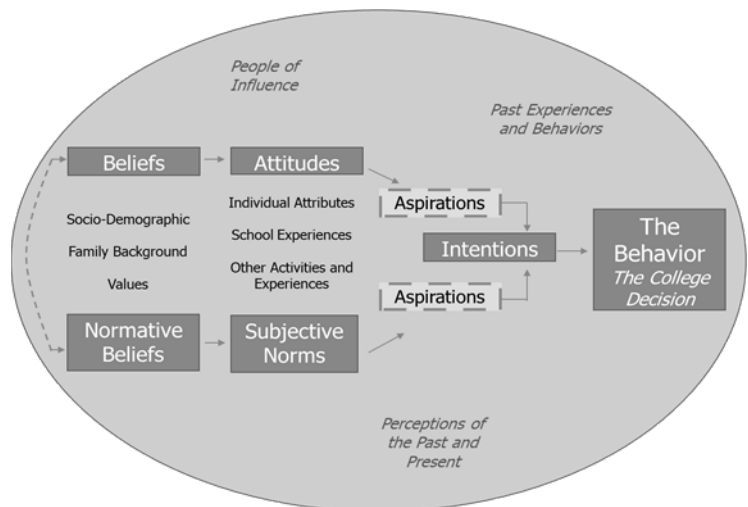
There were two types of settings where data were collected. First, researchers met with focus groups in seven locations: Snow College, Ephraim; Center for Education, Business, and the Arts, Kanab; Box Elder High School, Brigham City; Salt Lake Community College, Salt Lake; Southern Utah University, Cedar City; University of Utah, Salt Lake City; and Utah Valley University, Orem. Although groups of individuals were in the same room, each had her own computer and the facilitator introduced the study and helped participants transition from section to section.

Second, because there were not enough respondents from the focus groups, we opened the online survey for other participants who could join on their own time through the online survey platform from their homes and other locations.

Theoretical Model

Scholarly research studies are typically based on the academic research and formed around theoretical frameworks. This study utilized this research model (see Figure 1):

Figure 1: Research Model



Research Participants

Number: 245 participants

Counties: Box Elder, Cache, Davis, Emery, Grant, Iron, Kane, Millard, Salt Lake, Sanpete, Sevier, Tooele, Uintah, Utah, Washington, and Weber

Regions: Bear River (8.6%), Central (7.4%), Mountainland (32.4%), Southeastern (0.8%), Southwestern (14.8%), Uintah Basin (0.4%), and Wasatch Front (34.8%)

Ages: 18 years old (13.1%), 19 (11.4%), 20-21 (18.4%), 22-24 (22.4%), 25-28 (22.4%), 29-32 (12.2%)

Marital Status: single (46.9%), married (44.1%), separated/divorced (2.4%), living with partner (6.5%)

Religion: LDS/Mormon (80.4%), None (13.1%), Catholic (4.1%), and Other Christian (2.4%)

Race/Ethnicity: Caucasian/White (89.8%), Hispanic/Latina (4.5%), Pacific Islander (4.1%), American Indian/Alaskan Native (0.8%), Asian (0.4%), Mixed (0.4%)

High School Type: regular public (92.2%), alternative public (2.9%), public charter (1.6%), private (1.6%), home school (1.6%)

Parents Estimated Income: over \$100,000 (12.7%); \$75,000-\$99,999 (10.6%); \$50,000-\$74,999 (26.1%); \$35,000-\$49,999 (18.8%); \$20,000-\$34,999 (18.8%); and less than \$19,999 (13.1%)

Years in Utah: more than 17 years (68%), 10-17 years (23%), less than 10 years (9%)

Ancestors in Utah: Pioneers (28.2%), 100+ years (15.9%), 40+ years (17.6%), ancestors did not live in Utah (25.3%), history unknown (13.1%)

Family Years in Utah: both parents Utah natives (46.9%), only mother Utah native (9.4%), only father Utah native (9.4%), neither parent Utah native (30.2%), unknown (4.1%)

Limitations

As with every study, there are several limitations. For this study they include the following:

- The lack of participants from minority populations
- The lack of participants from religions other than LDS/Mormon
- The combination of various recruiting strategies to find enough participants (not a random sample across Utah)
- Perceptions from one point in time (participants addressed questions related to the past, present, and future all within a two-hour timeframe)
- Many of the statistics came from careful coding of qualitative data
- Causality is difficult to demonstrate in this type of research
- Caution should be used in generalizing the results for this research study to the female population at large.

Related Resources

The Utah Women and Education Project team (now the Utah Women & Leadership Project) has written and produced the following 12 research snapshots, as well as many additional resources located at www.utwomen.org. All resources below are hyperlinked:

Research Snapshots

1. The Benefits of Higher Education for Women in Utah
2. The Influence of a Father on a Daughter's College Decision
3. The Influence of a Mother on a Daughter's College Decision
4. The Influence of School Counselors and Administrators on a Young Woman's College Decision
5. The Influence of Teachers on a Young Woman's College Decision
6. The Influence of College Preparation Activities on a Young Woman's College Decision
7. The Influence of School Activities and Leadership Roles on a Young Woman's College Decision
8. The Influence of Finances on a Young Woman's College Decision
9. The Influence of Aspirations on a Young Woman's College Decision
10. The Influence of Other Significant People on a Young Woman's College Decision
11. The Influence of Religion and Values on a Young Woman's College Decision
12. The College Attendance Decisions of Young Women in Utah

Additional Resources

- Research and Policy Briefs
- Research Snapshots
- "What Can I Do?" Idea Sheets
- Impact Recommendation Reports
- Research-Based Resources
- Outside Research
- Toolkits
- Videos
- Podcasts
- Other Resources
- Events and Community Calendar

Conclusion

It is important we understand the reasons why more young women in Utah are not attending and graduating from college. The data collected from participants is published in twelve Research Snapshots. This valuable information will benefit young women, those who influence them, as well as positively impact communities in the state as a whole.

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