

A Study of Admission Officers'



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Perceptions of and Attitudes Toward Homeschool Students

Introduction

While the recent growth of homeschooling in America may not be an overall threat to public education in America today, some school districts are reporting that they are experiencing declines in their enrollments, which ultimately means a revenue loss in their school districts (Hetzner, 2000; Vater, 2001). The U.S. homeschool population (K-12) is estimated to be growing at a rate of 7-15 percent annually. The home-educated population is now expected to be the size of the public school population in Los Angeles and Chicago combined (Hill, 2000).

Before compulsory attendance laws became statutes in all states by the early 1900s, home education was practiced in many American homes. During the 17th and 18th centuries, parents and others were acting as tutors and educators for children in their homes. According to Knowles, Muchmore and Spaulding (1994) in the Native American culture, “Learning from elders through example was typically the only way in which Native American children were educated, and in such environments, education was viewed as being inseparable from life” (Knowles et al., 1994, p. 239). Some notable homeschoolers include William Penn, John Quincy Adams, Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Agatha Christie, Pearl Buck (Moore & Moore, 1982) General Douglas MacArthur, Charles Dickens, Andrew Carnegie, and Mark Twain (Gorder, 1987).

Once compulsory attendance became law, the home-education population not only was reduced, but was illegal in many states or seen as a tremendous controversy. Families homeschooling their children in the United States resurfaced as a viable alternative during the late 1960s and early 1970s (Knowles et al., 1994). The many families that elected to homeschool their children were either dissatisfied with public education or were being influenced by the writings of John Holt, one of the biggest critics of public education.

Today, homeschooling is legal in all 50 states. However, in spite of what homeschool families might see as a legal victory, college and university admission officers across the United States continue to grapple with how to address a growing population of the newly graduated homeschooled student that is knocking at the door of admission. It is estimated that the number of homeschooled children between the grades 9-12 is 14,000 (Bielick & Chandler, 2001).

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes and perceptions of college admission personnel toward the homeschooled graduate and, more specifically, to gain an understanding of the attitudes and perceptions of admission personnel, by examining their college admission policies for homeschool applicants and analyzing their attitudes and perceptions of admission personnel toward the homeschooled graduate population. The study was guided by the following research questions: What are the college admission policies for homeschool applicants? What are the attitudes and perceptions of admission personnel toward the homeschooled graduate population?

Method

Subjects

Fifty-five admission officers participated in this study. The admission officers were from institutions belonging to the Hawaii Association for College Admission Counseling, the Pacific Northwest Association for College Admission Counseling, Rocky Mountain Association for College Admission Counseling, and the Western Association for College Admission Counseling.

Only admission officers who were members of four-year institutions from these regional associations were surveyed. All accredited four-year institutional members were sent an electronic survey.

Data Collection and Instruments

Jenkins' (1998) survey instrument served as a model for the present survey. A modified three-part questionnaire was developed to gather data on the homeschool admission policies of four-year colleges and universities in Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Wyoming. The institutions were selected because they represented the entire western and rocky mountain regions of the United States.

Section One of the survey was Institutional Characteristics, which included institutional characteristics including institution type (state-supported, private, or church-affiliated) size, campus setting, and the Carnegie classification type. Section Two, Home School Admission Policies, requested information on the institution's admission policies for homeschool graduates. Section Three, Attitudes and Perceptions, requested information from admission officers on their perceptions and attitudes toward homeschool graduates.

Data Analyses

Data were collected from a survey containing 15 items. The survey instrument used rating scales, categorical scales, and rank-ordered scales. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and compiled in SPSS for analysis. To answer research question one, survey questions five through seven were analyzed to understand the homeschool admission policies of four-year institutions. To answer research question two, data were summated using questions 10-14 to understand the perceptions and attitudes of admission officers toward the homeschooled graduates expected success in college.

Additionally, a supplemental analysis was conducted to examine if there were differences between rural, suburban and urban institutions in how they expected the overall first-year success rate, and social coping of homeschooled students to be compared to traditional high school students. To test for differences, a One-way ANOVA was used. Secondly, to determine if there were differences between public and private institutions in how they expected the overall first-year success rate and social coping of homeschooled students to be compared to traditional high school students a *t* test was used.

Findings

A 15-item, three-part questionnaire was emailed to admission personnel at 159 four-year colleges and universities in Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Wyoming. A total of 55 responses were electronically received for a 35 percent return rate.



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Section I:

Homeschool Admission Survey

In section one of the survey, nearly 57 percent of the institutions responding to the questionnaire were from state-supported colleges or universities. Thirty-five percent of the admission officers reported that they were private institutions and 9 percent were church-affiliated institutions. Thus, 44 percent were private colleges. These percentages are similar to 51 percent of the selected sample that were private institutions (church and private combined), and the 49 percent that were public institutions (see Table 1).

Table 1

Survey Respondents by College Type		
Institutional Type	n	Percent
Church-Affiliated	5	9.1
Private Institution	19	34.5
State Institution	31	56.4
Total	55	100

The three largest Carnegie types that responded to the questionnaire were doctoral/research universities—extensive at 27.3 percent; master’s colleges and universities—at 25.5 percent; and baccalaureate colleges—liberal arts at 20 percent. The selected sample represented 36.4 percent doctoral/research intensive and extensive institutions compared to 27.3 percent in the actual sample, 41.1 percent were classified as master’s level institutions, and 22.8 percent from baccalaureate level institutions. The remaining 8.8 percent were coded as theological, business, or engineering institutions (see Table 2).

[Carnegie explains these types at <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/Classification/CIHE2000/defNotes/Definitions.htm>:

Doctoral/Research Universities—Extensive: These institutions typically offer a wide range of baccalaureate programs, and they are committed to graduate education through the doctorate. During the period studied, they awarded 50 or more doctoral degrees per year across at least 15 disciplines.

Doctoral/Research Universities—Intensive: These institutions typically offer a wide range of baccalaureate programs, and they are committed to graduate education through the doctorate. During the period studied, they awarded at least ten doctoral degrees per year across three or more disciplines, or at least 20 doctoral degrees per year overall.]

Table 2

Survey Respondents by Carnegie Classifications		
Carnegie Classification	n	Percent
Baccalaureate Colleges—General	2	3.6
Baccalaureate Colleges—Liberal Arts	11	20.0
Baccalaureate/Associate’s Colleges	2	3.6
Master’s Colleges and Universities I	14	25.5
Master’s Colleges and Universities II	2	3.6
Doctoral/Research Universities—Extensive	15	27.3
Doctoral/Research Universities—Intensive	5	9.1
Unknown	4	7.3
Total	55	100

Campus Size

The distribution of questionnaires returned by campus size is shown in Table 3. The most respondents, at 27.3 percent (15), were from institutions with enrollments fewer than 2,000 students. The second largest, at 23.6 percent, came from institutional enrollments between 10,000 and 19,999 students, followed closely by institutional enrollments between 2,000 and 4,999 at 21.8 percent. The lowest number reporting were institutions between the enrollment size of 5,000 and 9,999 at 12.7 percent.

Table 3

Survey Respondents by Campus Size		
Institution Size	n	Percent
Fewer than 2,000	15	27.3
2,000 to 4,999	12	21.8
5,000 to 9,999	7	12.7
10,000 to 19,999	13	23.6
20,000 or more	8	14.5
Total	55	100

Campus Setting

Finally, respondents were asked to classify their institutions by campus setting. The distribution of respondents by campus setting is shown in Table 4. Nearly half or 43.6 percent of the institutions responding indicated that their institution were located in a suburban setting. Urban setting at 29.1 percent was the second largest response followed by rural setting at nearly the same percentage at 27.3 percent.

Table 4

Survey Respondents by Campus Setting		
Campus Setting	n	Percent
Rural	15	27.3
Suburban	24	43.6
Urban	16	29.1
Total	55	100

Section II:

Admission Policy

In Section II of the Home School Admission Survey, admission officers were asked a series of questions regarding their homeschool admission policy. In the first question, admission officers were asked, “Does your institution have an official homeschool admission Policy?”

Forty-one or 74.5 percent of the admission officers indicated that they had an official homeschool admission policy. The remaining 13 (23.6 percent) institutions indicated that they did not have an official homeschool admission policy. Institutions with an official homeschool admission policy were asked to indicate what types of documents were required for homeschool graduates and to rank each required document by the level of importance, from highest to lowest, one being most important, eight being least important. Table 4 shows the results of their responses.

Table 4

Documents Required for Consideration for Admission for Homeschool Graduates			
Required Documents	Frequency	M	SD
ACT or SAT Test Scores	43	1.81	1.91
Essay	39	3.67	2.52
GED	37	3.95	2.68
Letters of Recommendation	40	4.13	2.52
SAT II (Subject Tests)	35	4.46	2.92
Personal Interview	37	4.49	2.65
Portfolio	33	4.64	2.86

Note: Mean rank with 1 being most important, 8 being least important.



The admission officers (43) said ACT or SAT Test scores were the most important ($M=1.81$) for admission. While 40 admission officers indicated that letters of recommendations were required for homeschool admission, letters of recommendation ranked fourth in importance. A total of 39 admission officers required an essay for homeschool admission, which ranked essay second in importance. Thirty-seven admission officers required GED test scores and personal interview for homeschool admission. However, personal interviews ranked near the bottom and GED test scores ranked third in importance for consideration for admission. Thirty-three required a portfolio for admission, which ranked as the least important among the grouping of documents.

Nearly one-third (29 percent) of the admission officers also indicated other documents are required for admission of homeschool graduates, including a homeschool transcript, a GED if homeschool transcripts were not available and transcripts from an approved school (accredited). One admission officer also stated that students must meet statewide eligibility test requirements consideration. One institution indicated that they “would not consider a homeschool applicant unless the homeschool applicant had taken courses in a community college or four-year university.” Another institution stated that they would “only consider a homeschool applicant if the homeschool graduate had taken community college work to validate essential course work.” Finally, one institution reported that homeschool applicants must demonstrate second-language proficiency for consideration for admission, perhaps because this is required for all applicants.

Institutions that responded that they did not accept homeschooled applicants, were asked why they did not accept these graduates. Only four schools responded. One admission officer reported that he or she did “not believe that students (homeschooled) are prepared for college.” Two admission officers indicated that the lack of (high school) accreditation prohibited the acceptance of homeschool applicants. The fourth admission officer reported that their state policy prohibited them from accepting a homeschool applicant, perhaps due to the institution’s misinterpretation of the policy since no other institution reported such a policy.

Admission officers also were asked to define their institution’s selectivity (less selective, open admission, selective, most selective). Nearly half (27) indicated that they were selective. Eleven admission personnel reported that their institution was highly selective and another 11 indicated that their institution was less selective. Five institutions reported that their institutions were considered open admission.

Admission officers were asked to provide the number of applications received from homeschool applicants during the most recent academic year. Table 5 shows the number of admission applications received from homeschool graduates.

Table 5

Number of Homeschool Applications Received Per Year		
Applications Received	Frequency	Percent
Less than 10	24	43.6
10-29	22	40.0
30-49	6	10.9
No Response	3	5.5
Total	55	100

Nearly 95 percent of the institutions indicated that they had received applications from homeschooled graduates. Twenty-four institutions (43.6 percent) indicated that they received less than 10 applications from homeschooled graduates. However, 22 (40 percent) reported that they received between 10-29 applications from homeschool applicants. Only six, or nearly 11 percent, reported receiving between 30-49 applications from homeschooled high school graduates.

One admission officer reported that he or she did “not believe that students (homeschooled) are prepared for college.”

Section III:

Attitudes and Perceptions

This section of the survey examined the perceptions and attitudes of admission officers toward the homeschooled population. Admission officers were asked how successful they expected homeschooled graduates to be compared to traditional high school graduates.

The first question asked admission officers how they expected the overall success of homeschooled applicants to compare to traditional high school graduates during their first-year of college.

Approximately 56 percent of the admission officers expected homeschool graduates to be as successful as traditional high school graduates, and nearly 22 percent expected them to be more successful. Only two admission officers expected homeschooled graduates to be less successful than traditional high school graduates. Ten (18 percent) admission officers did not respond.

Admission officers were also asked how they would expect the first-year grade point average of homeschool applicants to compare to traditional K-12 schooled applicants in the first year.

More than half (52.7 percent) of the admission officers expected the first-year grade point average of homeschool graduates to be about the same as traditional high school graduates, while nearly one-fourth (23.6 percent) expected homeschool graduates to outperform traditional high school graduates.

All admission officers at church-affiliated schools expected homeschooled graduates to earn about the same first-year grade point average as traditional high school graduates compared to 50 percent and 51.6 percent, respectively, of the private and state institution admission officers. A total of 27.8 percent of the admission officers at private institutions and 25.8 percent of the state institutions responding expected homeschooled graduates to have higher first-year grade point averages.

The third question asked admission personnel to rate how they expected the first-year retention rate of homeschooled graduates to compare to traditional high school graduates. Twenty-five (45.5 percent) of the admission officers expected homeschooled graduates to have about the same first-year retention rate as traditional high school graduates. Twenty percent expected a higher first-year retention rate among homeschool graduates and 12.7 percent expected traditional high school graduates to be retained at a lower rate than homeschool graduates. A total of 16.4 percent of the admission officers did not respond.

Admission officers also were asked to compare the number of credit hours each group earned. The majority (65.5 percent) of the admission officers expected homeschooled graduates to earn about the same number of credits as traditional high school graduates in their first year of college. Only one admission officer expected homeschooled graduates to earn fewer credits in their first-year, while 20 percent expected homeschooled graduates to earn more credits in their first-year.

Admission officers were asked how they expected homeschooled graduates to cope socially in their first year of college compared to traditional high school graduates. This question revealed that 43.6 percent of the admission officers expected homeschooled graduates to cope socially as well as traditional high school graduates their first year of college. However, almost 35 percent (19) expected homeschooled graduates would not to cope as well as traditional high school graduates (see Table 6).

Table 6

Expected First-Year Socially Coping of Homeschool Graduates Compared to Traditional High School Graduates		
Social Coping	Frequency	Percent
Not as well	19	34.5
About the same	24	43.6
Better	1	1.82
No Opinion	9	16.4
Missing	2	3.64
Total	55	100

The first question asked admission officers how they expected the overall success of homeschooled applicants to compare to traditional high school graduates during their first-year of college.

Finally, admission officers were asked if they would encourage homeschool applicants to attend a community/junior college before attending a four-year college or university, which allowed admission officers to say whether or not they would prefer homeschooled graduates to start at the four-year level or seek admission to a community college first. The majority (72.7 percent) of admission officers would not encourage graduates of homeschools to seek enrollment at a community college before enrolling at a four-year school. Only 16.4 percent answered “yes” to this question.

Supplemental Analysis

Supplemental analyses were conducted to examine whether admission officers at rural, suburban, and urban institutions differed in their opinions about homeschooled students’ overall first-year success rate and coping skills, compared to traditional high school students. A second analysis determined admission officers’ opinions at public and private (church-affiliated and private combined) institutions.

Investigating whether campus setting (rural, suburban or urban) seemed to have an effect on the expected overall success of homeschooled students compared to traditional high school students, a one-way ANOVA test yielded no significant difference between the admission officers based on campus setting. [$F(2,42) = 1.228, p = .303$].

Investigating whether campus setting (rural, suburban or urban) seemed to have an effect on how admission officers expected the first-year coping socially of homeschooled graduates to compare to traditional high school graduates, a one-way ANOVA test revealed a statistically significant difference between admission officers based on campus setting. [$F(2,41) = 4.585, p = .016$]. A post hoc comparisons test revealed that rural college admission officers thought homeschooled graduates would cope socially better [$p=.015$, urban $M=1.33$, rural $M=1.92$].

Determining if there were differences in public and private (church-affiliated and private combined institutions) admission officers expectations of the overall first-year success rate and coping socially of homeschooled students compared to traditional high school students, a t test revealed no statistical significance. [$t(43) = -.381, p = .705$]. The test also revealed no significant difference between public and private institutions in how they expected the homeschooled students to cope socially compared to traditional high school graduates in their first year. [$t(42) = -.453, p = .653$].

Discussion

Nearly three-fourths of the colleges and universities in the survey had an official homeschool admission policy. Barnebey’s (1986) study found that 90 percent of the institutions did not have an official homeschool admission policy. Jenkins (1998) study found that only 47 percent of the community college admission officers surveyed had an official admission policy for homeschooled graduates.

The ACT or SAT test was found to be the preferred item utilized for consideration for admission, followed by an essay or GED test score. Similar results were found in Jenkins' and Barnebey's studies, although 97 percent of the admission officers in Barnebey's study stated that high school grades were a standard requirement. Jenkins's study also revealed that no community college admission officer reported that they would require an essay for admission.

The final research question asked about the attitudes and perceptions of admission personnel toward the homeschooled graduate population.

Overall, more than half (55 percent) of the admission officers surveyed expected homeschooled graduates to perform about the same as traditional high school graduates (overall success rate, first-year grade point average, retention rate, credit hours earned, and social coping); 18 percent expected homeschooled graduates would be more successful; and nearly 12 percent expected homeschooled graduate would be less successful. Jenkins' (1998) study found that not as many community college admission officers expected homeschool students to be as successful (36 percent) as traditional high school graduates; however, 27 percent of the admission officers expected homeschooled students to be more successful than traditional high school graduates, and only 5.7 percent expected homeschooled students to be less successful than traditional high school graduates. Barnebey's (1986) study found that nearly 46 percent of the admission officers that accepted homeschooled applicants expected them to be as successful, 4.5 percent more successful; however, 50 percent expected homeschooled students to be less successful.

The study revealed that only 16.4 percent of the admission officers would encourage homeschooled students to attend a community college or junior college prior to attending a four-year institution. This compares to 65.5 percent of the admission officers in Barnebey's (1986) study who stated that they would encourage homeschooled applicants to attend a junior/community college before applying to a four-year institution.

This study revealed that nearly 11 percent of the institutions received between 30-49 applications each year from homeschooled applicants, 40 percent received between 10-29 applications, and nearly 44 percent received less than 10 applications each year.

Also, 33 institutions indicated they require homeschooled graduates to submit a portfolio for admission; 37 required a personal interview and GED; 35 required the SAT II subject tests; and 40 required homeschooled students to submit letters of recommendation. This might indicate that admission officers may be requiring homeschooled graduates to jump through more admission hoops than traditional high school graduates. Therefore, homeschooled graduates may be opting for fewer hoops to jump through and are applying to and attending the community college prior to applying to the four-year college or university.

Overall, the attitudes and perceptions of admission officers were favorable toward the expected success of the homeschooled graduate. More than seventy-three percent of the admission officers anticipated that homeschooled graduates would be as successful or more successful in their first-year of college. While most colleges and universities in this study indicated that they had an official homeschool admission policy, doctoral (85 percent), state (80 percent) and church-affiliated institutions (80 percent), those with enrollments between 10,000-19,999 (92 percent), or in rural (86.7 percent) settings seemed more favorable to the homeschool applicants.



Conclusion

This study reveals the tremendous shift, over the past 15 years, in admission officers' attitudes toward and perceptions of the homeschooled graduate. More than 78 percent of the admission officers surveyed indicated that they expect homeschool graduates to perform, overall, as well or better in their first-year of college than traditional high school graduates. In a recent study, Jones and Gloeckner (2004) revealed that homeschooled graduates performed as well as their traditional high school peers.

While three-fourths revealed that they have admission policies in place for homeschool applicants, colleges and universities still should reevaluate their policies to ensure the removal of unnecessary barriers for these students. For example, the 35 percent of colleges and universities, which don't expect homeschooled graduates to cope socially as well as their traditional school peers, are reluctant to change their personal interview policies. However, if schools do not require certain admission criteria of other applicants, they must reassess the fairness of a policy required *only* of homeschool applicants. Schools that are unwilling to make their policies more homeschool-friendly will see homeschool graduates gravitate elsewhere and miss admitting a large, and often highly successful, percentage of the student population.

While three-fourths revealed that they have admission policies in place for homeschool applicants, colleges and universities still should reevaluate their policies to ensure the removal of unnecessary barriers for these students.

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