



Addressing Home Educating Parents' Post-Secondary Concerns

by Léo Gaumont

Many home educating parents find themselves fearful about the future career prospects for their children. They believe that by teaching their children at home, the children will not receive proper preparation for post-secondary training, and thus be severely handicapped in their employment opportunities. As a result, they often place their children in a public or private school for high school or use government curriculum at home to get official course credits that they believe will ease entry into post-secondary institutions. In other words, they compromise their commitment to Christian education out of fear for the future while demonstrating a greater faith in the educational “standards” and “expectations” of man than in God.

At *Education Unlimited*, we take a different view. We believe that if God wants children to receive a consistently Christian education (and He does), then He will make a way for each of them to achieve their purpose in life. Parents and students don't need to rely on the government's secular humanist schools or curriculum to be successful in life. We believe parents can provide their children with the best Christian education at home, without any government curriculum, programs or interventions. This will enable their children to flourish, whether they choose to obtain advanced education or not.

Let us help you think about these issues from a practical Christian perspective.

Thinking About the Future

First of all, the future is not in our hands. Our job is to lead our children to the Lord so He can lead them in their lives. We, as parents, don't control our own future, and neither can we control our children's. We must leave them in His hands, knowing that He will provide them with a range of opportunities in keeping with their gifts, talents and abilities. Our job as parents and home educators is to provide opportunities for learning and let the children soar with their strengths while teaching them to manage their weaknesses.

Also, it is important to determine our motivation as parents for wanting our children to obtain a post-secondary education. Be careful not to confuse distinction and prestige with purpose. Parents are called to prepare their children for eternity, not for post-secondary education and your success as home educating parents will not be measured by where your children end up.

Home educated students have the freedom to be who they really are, rather than being compelled to fit arbitrary categories determined by school authorities. As Christians our worldview leads us to seek our callings which will direct our educational choices. As someone once said, “God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called”.

A home educated student's learning will eventually lead to a job, a business, or to further education. Every post-secondary option requires additional learning but not all require post-secondary training. A student who has been allowed to be who he or she really is will find his or her purpose in life. If fulfilling that purpose requires higher learning, then he or she will be ready to attend the institution, from which the necessary credentials to enter a chosen field can be obtained. Once accredited in the field, real learning through experience will quickly develop. In short, there is only one reason to consider post-secondary training and that is to get the “ticket” that allows the student to pursue the field that is in keeping with who he or she really is. We also need to take costs into account. Accumulating big debt for a potential job with minimal return in income is not a wise use of time or resources.

Post-Secondary Admissions

Most post-secondary institutions are not against home education, but they are often ignorant of it or simply don't understand it. Most have or are willing to adapt policies to accommodate unaccredited home educated students. Although high school diplomas may be cited as necessary, in reality they are not required. Know that post-secondary institutions are not interested in keeping students out but in finding students who are most likely to succeed in the program. They are, in essence, businesses, benefitting more from successful than from failing students. That is why they are particular about who gets in.

Schooling tries to fit the student to the program, and the student receives government issued credits, a transcript and perhaps, a diploma. These outcomes all involve arbitrary and artificial educational "standards" that cannot be truly assessed, yet form a basis upon which most post-secondary institutions measure prospective students. Unlike schooling, home education fits the program to the student, so he or she does not receive government issued credits, transcripts, or diplomas. Therefore, post-secondary institutions need to use alternate tools for assessing unaccredited home educated students while students need to provide alternate forms of documentation and proof of proficiency. Regardless of where a student has obtained his or her secondary level training, it is important to know that all prerequisite requirements for any program must be met and are not negotiable!

When considering which post-secondary institution to choose, it's good to take into account their size. The bigger the institution the less accommodating of differences it usually is. As well, private institutions are usually more amenable than public ones. Since smaller, private post-secondary institutions are usually friendlier to home educated students than larger, public ones, one admission option is to start at a smaller institution and later transfer into a larger institution.

Post-secondary institutions already admit students who don't follow the provincially-accredited route. What post-secondary institutions do with international students, interprovincial students, and adult students can also be applied to unaccredited home educated students. There are a variety of approaches being used to evaluate "alternate" students which may include one or more of the following features.

Before discussing those features, one thing needs to be made very clear. It is important to be aware that earning government credits for whatever reason or by any means, may actually hurt a student's chances of getting into post-secondary institutions. Obtaining a few credits, without fulfilling all of the requirements to complete a high school diploma, will lead to an incomplete transcript. Some institutions may interpret that as indicating the student is a "failure" or "dropout." Beware that school boards and home education providers who (often self-servingly) provide credits may not make you aware of the dangers of partially completed transcripts.

Portfolios

At times in the recent past, student portfolios were seen as helpful aids to post-secondary admissions. This is not so much the case anymore. A portfolio is essentially an expanded résumé in a binder that includes a personal profile, a record of academic achievements, and a diary of personal experiences and accomplishments. A portfolio is intended to serve as an alternative to a provincially-accredited diploma and transcript. Every portfolio is unique because every student is unique.

Creating a portfolio is a lot of work. A summary of the student's program and achievements in each subject area is needed, followed by a more detailed description for those who want more information. It should be straightforward and concise as well as user-friendly, no more than what can be included in a half-inch

binder, as most admissions officers will be intimidated by anything larger. If more information is available than what can fit that binder, indicate that it can be made available upon request.

Portfolios cannot be used everywhere, but they can sometimes be beneficial where post-secondary institutions will accept them in lieu of transcripts. However, as mentioned, this is less the case now than before. They are more likely to be accepted at smaller, private than larger, public institutions and for art and music students where portfolios may be the only way to appropriately demonstrate the students' skills, level of achievement and accomplishments. Because of the work involved, before engaging in creating a personal portfolio, students should check to see if their preferred post-secondary institution is even interested in considering one as part of the admissions process.

One potential side benefit of a portfolio is the encouragement that both the student and parents get through its creation. Recording the work that has been accomplished builds confidence in the student's abilities and usually addresses the parent's concerns about not having done enough!

Proving Proficiency and Testing

Everyone agrees that all students who attend post-secondary institutions must be proficient to succeed. Sometimes the only way to determine proficiency for unaccredited students is by testing. Some institutions have their own tests for determining whether home educated students have the English skills, math skills or other skills necessary for admittance. Others may rely on standardized tests that are generally recognized by the academic community.

The most familiar standard test is the SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test). In the United States, the College Board administers the SAT, a skills-based rather than a curriculum-based test, so that colleges and universities can compare students from different parts of the country with different educational programs. While virtually all American colleges and universities use them, Canadian institutions may not accept SAT results, so before a student writes the SAT, he or she should ascertain whether or not it would be accepted by his or her desired institution. It can generally be stated, though, that students who are not successful with the SAT will usually not be successful at the post-secondary level. On the other hand, students who do well on the SAT have one more useful item to present when seeking admission into post-secondary institutions and may even find themselves eligible for financial aid.

Another assessment option used by some institutions is generally known as Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR), which may be available for adult learners. PLAR can be used to evaluate skills and knowledge that have been learned outside of the institution, such as what has been gained from several years' experience in a given field. Generally speaking, institutions that have the PLAR option available will allow a student to write the final exam for a course without actually taking it, and if successful, the student receives full credit for that course. If an institution does not have a PLAR option, a prospective student could still request permission to write the institution's introductory English or math course final exams to prove proficiency in prerequisite courses required for admission. Fees are usually charged for writing an exam but they are usually less than the full course tuition.

It should go without saying that any student who feels threatened by testing is actually not ready for the post-secondary world.

Taking Courses as a Means to Post-Secondary Admissions

Taking night courses, extension courses or online courses from the institution you wish to attend is a good way to show your abilities without having to register as a full-time student. Online courses can be taken from any institution and they often have open admissions, meaning that anyone can take them if prerequisites are met. Because they do not occupy a physical room, there are usually no limitations on how many students can take an online course, and the course can usually be adapted to fit within a student's schedule. Taking courses of this sort, and then transferring them into another institution, is becoming a simple and proven method for the admittance of home educated students into post-secondary institutions and may also help students to qualify for advanced standing in their program of choice.

It is advised that the student contact the desired institution to ensure that the online courses he or she intends to take will meet the prerequisites and to find out whether or not they can be applied as credit towards the program the student wants to enter.

Application For Admission

One of the most common misconceptions of home educated students, and often of the home educating parents, is that they are not as well prepared as their “schooled” counterparts. It cannot be overstated that nothing could be further from the truth! Home educated students have been studied in a myriad of ways in a multitude of environments and the results have always been the same. No matter where these students have ended up, whether they have gone to college or not, regardless of what career option was chosen, home educated students come out equal or better than the publicly schooled versions. Dr. Michael Wagner (see www.educationunlimited.ca/includes/documents/loaddocument/16-Home-Educated-Students-in-Post-Secondary-Institutions.pdf) has summarized a collection of such studies to encourage the home education community with the knowledge that home educated students are not ruined but fully equipped to succeed in real positions, in a real world and in a real way. As previously mentioned, God makes no mistakes in creating the children and He makes no mistakes when caring for them. If we lack that kind of faith in Him, we seriously need to question why we are home educating in the first place.

When it comes time to apply for post-secondary admission, the student needs to be the one directing his or her destiny and taking the initiative. In the end, home educated students normally have to help the admissions personnel understand them. Responses that the student receives can depend on who in the admissions department he or she deals with. If the student encounters opposition when applying, it may be necessary to approach a more senior admissions officer or someone more directly connected to the desired program who may be more sympathetic to home education.

Remember that the job of the registrar is very difficult. He needs to find the best students possible to fill the classes, while the home educated student's job is to prove that he or she is one of the best candidates for the limited available positions, even if unaccredited. A student who demonstrates initiative, considerably suggests possible alternatives to unreasonable requests, and politely expresses his ambition to enter the institution, will have a better chance of acceptance by demonstrating a level of maturity not often seen in publicly educated students. Students should always make application and deal directly with the institution individually as the inclusion of parents is deemed to indicate immaturity on the part of the student.

In Conclusion

It is good when a student is accepted into a program of choice, but it is not necessarily bad if not. If we trust God, we will occasionally discover that what we thought we wanted is not actually what we should have. Also, if an institution is found to be completely unreasonable or intransigent, you must decide whether or not you actually want to attend such an institution. Finally, should you find a door closed on you, just consider that to be an opportunity to go somewhere else. There is no shortage of post-secondary institutions to fulfill your needs, especially with modern day internet access. In the end, understand that if God has created you to do something, there is only one person who could possibly prevent you from accomplishing what He has set out for your life, and that would be you and your lack of faith or resolve to see the task completed.

One final word of caution for parents who remain skeptical about success without accreditation. Generally speaking, most parents have not been home educated and as a consequence most have been seriously indoctrinated into believing in the need for accreditation and/or certification. There is no lack of organizations and agencies willing to take advantage of this perceived need and, likewise, seemingly no limits to the products they promise to deliver; but they all have one thing in common. They get or charge a fee for their services, and most do not inform you of the potential uselessness of their products. Any high school diploma not awarded by the local jurisdiction may be as good as no diploma at all, depending on who issued it and where it was issued.

Many foreign college degrees and certificates, while impressive on the wall, may have no practical application in the home jurisdiction. Canadian institutions often frown on American certification and accreditation, especially from institutions that are unaccredited or of questionable status. Even though one should never discourage higher education, there is a difference between earning a degree and being able to apply it in a practical way. Don't let the paper on the wall fool you into paying good money for what may ultimately be of little practical value. Students are strongly advised to ascertain what foreign certification or accreditation will be accepted in their home jurisdiction by asking local authorities rather than the agencies offering the programming, as it is not in their best interest to inform and potentially discourage you from enrolling with them.

In summary, these are the seven steps every post-secondary bound home educated student needs to follow:

1. Determine who you are. Be comfortable with your strengths and weaknesses.
2. Determine what you want to do, in keeping with who you are.
DO NOT GO TO COLLEGE TO FIND YOURSELF AS YOU ARE NOT LOST!
3. Determine how you are going to get to where you want to be. Choose the vehicle, or in this case, institution that will provide the means to get what you want. There may be a number of institutions that can do that, but like every other "purchase," some will better suit you than others.
4. Determine what the prerequisites are (what you need to get in) for your chosen program.
5. Determine how you will prove you have the prerequisites (documentation).
6. Determine how you are going to prove you have proficiency in the necessary fields.
7. Determine to make application with confidence and be prepared to have to do a few extra things to gain admission. If nothing else works, persistence will.

Nothing is impossible if you have faith and are DETERMINED to walk in it! (Luke 11: 5-13)

Education Unlimited has a successful history of students being accepted in institutions across Canada, without institutional accreditation of any kind. Nothing can replace faith in God as He never fails.