

Home Education and Post Secondary Admissions

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Abstract

Home education is the fastest rising educational alternative in North America. As the number of home educated students increases, more will be seeking admission into post-secondary institutions. This paper describes the general attributes of home education, reviews the results of the National Survey of Post Secondary Admission Requirements for Home Educated Students and addresses the problems created by this newly emerging phenomenon. Some suggestions are also given on what can be done to accommodate these students at a post secondary level. Some of the information presented has been gathered from various resources cited while a great deal has been collected through my 14 years experience as a home school dad, supervisor/facilitator and director of a willing non-resident school board registering and serving home educating families. Personal study and research of the home school admission practices of post secondary institutions as well as the preparedness of home educated students for post secondary level training over many years has resulted in an understanding of the issues related to home education and post secondary admissions.

General Description of Home Education

Once considered to be an option only when public education was not available, home education eventually came to be accepted as an exemption to compulsory school attendance given only in special circumstances. Today, home education is increasingly being viewed as an acceptable alternative to public education (Smith,1996). It is legal in all Canadian provinces and territories and well in all 50 states. Each province has its own specific regulations governing home education. Home schooling is now officially recognized as an educational option within the Education Acts of Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, and Yukon Territory(Smith, 1996). Alberta is the only province that currently(2002) funds home education, but that comes with a price. All registered students are to be under the supervision of a certified teacher. Alberta is also the only province that requires testing. Although the province has mandated that all students in grades 3, 6 and 9 write the

Provincial Achievement Tests, other tests have come to be accepted as alternatives.

There has generally been a steady decline in home school regulations over the last few years. It is generally known that the more restrictive the governmental regulations are, the greater the degree of non-compliance to those regulations. Some parents believe that the government does not set the educational agenda for their children and will not register their children with the government no matter what the regulations may be.

Who Home-Educates?

Home schoolers are very difficult group to profile. The hundreds of homes that I have visited represent a very broad demographic range. Although modern home schooling started as a Christian movement, home schoolers can no longer be easily identified with any particular group(Welner & Welner, 1999). In fact, the fastest growing subgroup within the home school movement in the United States today are Islamic(Basham, 2001). Home educating parents come from all walks of life, represent all faiths, all levels of income, education and occupations. however, it is understood that the majority are Christian.

Much as it is impossible to accurately assess the demographics of home educators, their characteristics are also difficult to measure. A few characteristics, however, can be ascribed to home schoolers generally. Obviously all home educators do not want their children in school, their rationalizations being very diverse. The vast majority of home educators come from two parent homes, and greatly value family(Rudner, 1999). There does not appear to be any significant difference in the results of home schooling if one or both of the parents are certified teachers (Rudner, 1999). Personal experience has shown that parents who have had teacher training often have difficulty educating their children at home, being more comfortable with mimicking the school at home than inventing new educational pedagogy that better fits a home learning environment. Half of the home schooling parents have post secondary training(Ray, 1999).

Another common characteristic of home educators is that they spend very little money educating their children. It may be argued that this is more a case of necessity since choosing to home educate does obligate one of the parents to stay home resulting in less total family income. It can also be argued that it is just less expensive to do the job at home. Basham points out that home education costs an average \$546.00 per student and results in an average 85th percentile ranking on standardized test scores while public education manages only the 50th percentile while spending an average \$5325.00 per student (Basham, 2001).

The actual population of home school students is even more difficult to ascertain. Studies have indicated widely disparaging numbers in both Canada and the United States (Basham, 2001; Bauman, 2002; Ray, 1994; Ray, 1997). The number of home schooled students is usually determined through provincial and state registrations but provincial/state home education organizations indicate that the numbers are far greater than actually reported. This is best explained by the fact that not all home educators register their children with the government. Canadian estimates reach 80 000 students (Basham, 2001) and American estimates reach 2 million (Ray, 1999). Ray goes on to say that at the present rate of growth of 7%, the population of American home schooled students will reach 3 million by 2010. Comparing estimates of 2000 Canadian students in 1979 to 60 000 in 1997 shows a fifteen fold increase in the population of home schoolers in eight years (Basham, 2001). Using Basham's and Ray's rate of growth, puts the potential Canadian home school student population at between 120 000 and 200 000 by the year 2010.

Even though home education is the fastest growing educational trend in the world, home educating parents will always remain a minority. This is not so much an endorsement of public education as it is a reflection of the nature of home education. Only parents prepared to dedicate enormous amounts of time, effort, energy and the personal funds that is required to teach their children at home are going to make that kind of commitment.

Why Are Parents Choosing to Home Educate?

Parents choose to educate their children at home for a broad range of reasons. In the past, home education studies have placed parents in one of two categories. Ideologues are described as parents opposed to the school curriculum and pedagogues are those who object to the way schools are structured (Arai). Arai found that these constructs did not apply in Canada. Personal experience confirms the three general reasons for home schooling put forth by D.S. Smith (1996). The primary reason is the belief that the educational system no longer upholds the religious and moral convictions of the parents. Some parents cite a general dissatisfaction with the school system while others are simply convicted that the welfare and education of their children is their responsibility. No matter what the reason for educating their children at home, the overwhelming motivation for doing so is simply that these parents want what's best for their children and their families. They believe that they are the best candidates to deliver the best program and are prepared to do whatever it takes to meet these objectives. Regardless of motivation, home educators do not take their children out of school to isolate them from others (Arai, 1999).

What Are They Doing At Home?

There are indeed a great deal of different methods used to educate students at home, however, approaches can be generally described as home schooling, home educating or unschooling. Home schooling is when a school is in control of the student's education. Following the prescribed provincial programming, the school sets all the educational parameters for the student who merely studies at home with some flexibility in scheduling. Correspondence, virtual/online schools and blended education fall into this category. Students following this method will most likely earn the provincially accredited diploma and so not present real problems to admission directors at a post secondary level.

Home educating is when parents set the agenda for their children's education. They choose the curriculum, level, scope, sequence, pace and methodology. Some of these parents will test their students using standardized skills-based testing but many refuse to do so.

Unschoolers see curriculum and testing as restrictive, counter-productive and foreign to natural learning. These educators allow the students to set the agenda with varying degrees of direction, believing that the child will do what they are ready for when they are interested. Obviously, this methodology does require a high level of motivation on the part of the student but there are students for whom this works well.

Home education and unschooling will not likely lead to the provincially accredited diploma and so comprise the group that registrars and admission directors of post secondary institutions find problematic. One should also note that the term "home schooling" is used as the generic term describing all methods of education being completed at home.

Methods may vary but a developing trend in home schooling is that a growing number of home educating parents are deciding against administering standardized tests(Welner & Welner,1999). Another trend is more parents and students are choosing to proceed with home education through the secondary (high school) levels. This trend is of particular importance to admission directors of post secondary institutions.

Besides academic education, Arai noted that 30% of home schooled students, five year of age or older in both the United States and Canada were actively involved in volunteer work, compared to 6-12% for schooled students. Contrary to popular misconceptions about socialization, home schooled kids were very active in functions outside the home, 98% in two or more per week(Arai, 1999). Home education offers larger amounts of time in which children can play, read what interests them and work to gain experience.

How Are Home Schoolers Doing?

The short answer is very well indeed. In 1997 Dr. Brian Ray of the National Home Education Research Institute published "A Nationwide Study of Home Education in Canada, Family Characteristics, Student Achievement and Other Topics". He found that the average home educated student ranked in the 80th percentile in reading / 84th in listening / 76th in language / 79th in mathematics / 82nd in science / 81st in social studies. The basic battery averaged at the 79th percentile while the complete battery at the 82nd percentile. Dr. Lawrence Rudner(1998) in another study, found the median scores for home school students (70th to 80th percentile) to be well above their public/private school counterparts in every subject and in every grade. Basham's study found public school students ranked in the 50th percentile, private school students ranked, on average, in the 65th-75th percentile, while home educated students averaged in the 75th to 85th percentile (Basham, 2001). In grades one through four, the median ITBS/TAP composite scaled scores for home school students are a full grade above that of their public/private school peers. The gap starts to widen in grade five. By the time home school students reach grade 8, their median scores are almost 4 grade equivalents above their public/private school peers. The longer a student has been educated at home the better the results with those who had been educated at home all their lives achieving the highest overall scores(Rudner, 1998).

Home schoolers are also doing very well in most national contests. Even though home schoolers make up only 2% of the student population, 11% of qualifiers for the American National Spelling Bee and 22% of the qualifiers for the National Geographic's Geography Bee are home schooled(<http://www.hslda.org>).

Home schoolers have on average have done very well at the post secondary level. The Wall Street Journal quotes a dean from Brown University who said "they (home-schoolers) are self directed, they take risks and they don't back off". In short he said they were the epitome of what Ivy League colleges are looking for(The Report Newsmagazine, Vol 29, No. 12, pg3). In the United states, home schoolers earn higher than average scores on both the ACT's & SAT's(<http://www.hslda.org>).

Why Are Home Educated Students Successful?

There are a number of reasons that children educated at home are successful. The main reasons is that a home education provides a great deal of freedom for parents to tailor the program to stimulate learning and to meet the individual needs of each child. Home school provides the time and opportunity for a child to explore without fear of ridicule and at a pace that best suits his/her abilities and strengths. This may explain why home schooled kids often have a higher self-concept (Ray,1999).

Standards are also high in a learning environment where a parent can insist on quality work and can afford the time to repeat or redo anything that fails to meet that standard. In the world of home education 50% just isn't good enough. Parents having to be at home all the time can monitor the student's activities, leading to less time spent on the TV and more on the computer (Rudner, 1998), ostensibly for study purposes. Such close monitoring and guidance leads students to developing a disciplined work ethic and high moral standards that contribute to their success.

Perhaps the greatest reason for success is the sincere love and individual personal touch that only a parent can give, and the desire on the part of the child to want to please their parent. Even the very best teacher in the public system is obligated to be the director of learning and guardian for 20 or more students, all in the same place at the same time, capable or not, willing or not, interested or not. It is, therefore, reasonably understood why most home educators have a high degree of respect for dedicated public school teachers (Arai???). The following chart compares some of the attributes of public/private school to home school.

<u>Public/Private School</u>	<u>Home School</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● P/T Ratio 25:1 ● Trained specialists ● Standard Curriculum and Programming ● Advance by Grade ● Homogeneous Peer Group (Bullying / Peer Pressure / Ridicule) ● Low work ethic / 50% pass ● Little opportunity for specialization ● Less time for recreational learning ● Older technology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● P/T Ratio 4:1 ● Caring generalists ● Personal Curriculum and Programming ● By Accomplishment ● Heterogeneous Peer Group (Strong Social skills / risk taking) ● Good work ethic / 80% pass ● Emphasis on strengths / can specialize ● More time for recreational learning ● Modern Technology

"When dealing with home schoolers, legislators, educators, and administrators should remember that just as parents cannot match or provide all the infrastructure of a school within the home, a school cannot provide the attention and care of a loving, concerned, and responsible parent." (Smith, 1996)

Canadian National Survey of Post Secondary Institutions' Policies for Home-Educated Students

Rather than repeat information already made public, the reader is encouraged to visit <http://www.educationunlimited.ca/results.pdf>, where the full report may be found.

The findings of the survey can be summarized as follows:

- Private institutions had a higher percentage of participation and were generally less restrictive for home schoolers than public ones.
- Larger institutions were generally more reluctant to answer the survey and were generally more restrictive of home schoolers than smaller institutions.
- A very small proportions (18.6%) of participating institutions has a home education policy but most (98.3%) were interested in what other institutions were doing to accommodate home educated students.

The survey help show that private (mostly faith-based) institutions were generally smaller, had less bureaucracy, were more inclined to work on an individual basis to accommodate home educated students and so had more extensive experience with them. Not to negate the efforts of larger institutions, those that participated in the survey also accommodated home schooled students and were generally very positive in their comments.

Canadian College Comments

The following comments are excerpts from question 2.h of the questionnaire which asked "Describe your experience with home schooled students".

- Home schoolers desire to succeed; involved in music; self-motivated
- Generally fairly self-motivated; able to go ahead with little prodding.
- Our experience is limited, but we have found they have fit in well and done well.
- Of the 3, one has graduated from a 3 year program with a 3.94 AGPA(on a 4.0 scale), one transferred to a community college after her 1st year(with a 2.18 AGPA), and one is currently in 1st year(with a 3.64 AGPA in Fall 2000)
- Often over-achieving; mostly all involved in extra-curricular activity; lots of parental support
- They have performed well at the university level.
- Generally good, although students following a "mastery learning" model sometimes have an adjustment period to study here. There are also occasional social adjustments, but this true of non-home study students from small communities too!

- Generally they are more independent and require less assistance with processes such as registration, etc. They seem to be able to budget time well.
- For the most part, the few home school students who have made applications to the U of G have presented transcripts with good to very good results.
- The few students who have registered at the University of Toronto have achieved GPA's ranging from 2.74/B- to 3.96/A+ out of 4.00

Alberta Provincial Survey

Following the national survey it was determined that more accurate information on post secondary admission practices regarding home educated students could be obtained if Canadian institutions were to be surveyed on a provincial basis. This would allow for more provincially pertinent information to be gathered in greater detail and would involve all the institutions of each province rather than the few who chose to participate in the national survey. Information gathered from such surveys could then be processed and made public to inform all home educated students seeking post secondary admission of the avenues and processes available to them.

My home province of Alberta was chosen as the first to be surveyed and the task is only partly complete at the time of writing. The more personal approach yielded some interesting observations. Once again, the smaller institutions are generally more open to "alternative students". Institutions that appear to be unfriendly are more likely to not understand the plight of home schoolers rather than to be hostile towards them. It is also quite evident at this point of the study that all institutions are interested in doing what they can to accommodate home educated students. Although Alberta is the only province currently undergoing an in depth, and inclusive survey, there are a number of people in many provinces ready to conduct similar surveys.

Rating Colleges & Universities by their Home School Admission Policies

The Canadian post secondary experience with home schooled students is relatively young in comparison with that of our American neighbors. In the United States, the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) in association with the National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI) have organized post secondary institutions in three tiers that rank institutions according to their home school admission practices and policies. The most current listing can be found at <http://www.hslda.org> with appropriate links. An interesting observation of this site over time is that institutions seem to be under pressure to be included in the best ranking at Tier I.

US College Experience

There are no lack of positive comments to be found on the various web sites and publications on home education. The following comments are included as examples of what American post secondary institutions are saying about home educated students. All the comments are taken from the HSLDA web site, in particular from Chris Kicka's document entitled "Home Schooled Students Excel In College" (<http://www.hslda.org/docs/nche/000000/00000017.asp>).

- In 1997, Dr. Irene Prue, Assistant Director of Admission of Georgia Southern University, released a nationwide survey of admissions personnel's knowledge, attitudes and experiences with home educated applicants. In general, a total of 210 (out of the 1,289 surveyed) respondents to the study reported: (1) Home schoolers are academically, emotionally, and socially prepared to succeed at college. (2) Parental motivations and involvement are in the best interest of their children. (3) While documentation and evaluation of home schooled applicants is problematic, it is not insurmountable.
- A letter sent in 1991 to home school leaders in Massachusetts from Thomas M. Rajala, Director of Admissions at Boston University stated "Boston University welcomes applications from home schooled students. We believe students educated at home possess the passion for knowledge, the independence, and the self-reliance that enable them to excel in our intellectually challenging programs of study".
- The following comment, made by Jon Reider, Stanford's senior associate director of admissions concerning the success of home schoolers, was reported in a recent article in the Wall Street Journal: "Home-schoolers bring certain skills – motivation, curiosity, the capacity to be responsible for their education – that high schools don't induce very well." (February 11, 2000, *The Wall Street Journal*, article by Daniel Golden)
- At Bob Jones University in South Carolina, Drs. Paulo de Oliveira, Timothy Watson, and Joe Sutton studied 789 students who graduated from public, private, and home schools. They concluded that overall, home schoolers perform "as well as, if not better than, their conventionally educated counterparts."
- Mike Mitchell (Dean of Enrollment Management at Oral Roberts University) reported that 88% of home schoolers were active in all areas of college life, debunking the myth that home schoolers are largely unsocialized.

The following article is also reprinted from the HSLDA web site with permission and is intended to provide further evidence of the successes of home educated students in the United States.

Home Schoolers in Ivy League Universities

- The Wall Street Journal, in a May 10, 1994 article, confirmed that many colleges are adjusting their admissions policies to home schoolers: Many colleges now routinely accept home-schooled students, who typically present "portfolios" of their work instead of transcripts. Each year Harvard University takes up to 10 applicants who have had some home schooling. "In general, those kids do just fine," says David Illingsworth, senior admissions officer. He adds that the number of applications and inquiries from home schoolers is "definitely increasing."

- A 1996 survey of over 60 colleges and universities in all fifty states conducted by the National Center for Home Education revealed the following anecdotal accounts of home schoolers in college: A Harvard University (MA) admissions officer said most of their home educated students "have done very well. They usually are very motivated in what they do." Results of the SAT and SAT II, an essay, an interview, and a letter of recommendation are the main requirements for home educated applicants. "[Transcripts are] irrelevant because a transcript is basically a comparison to other students in the school."

- In addition to Harvard, prominent schools like Yale (CT), Princeton (NJ), Texas A&M, Brown University (RI), the Carnegie Mellon Institute (PA), the Universities of Arizona, Maryland, Virginia, Hawaii and many others all have flexible transcript criteria, accept parental evaluations, and do not require any accreditation or a General Equivalency Diploma (GED). At Kansas State University and others like Lipscomb University and Middlebury College (VT), transcripts are optional.

- A February 11, 2000 *Wall Street Journal* article stated that: A recent survey by the National Center for Home Education, a Virginia-based advocacy group, found that 68% of colleges now accept parent-prepared transcripts or portfolios in place of an accredited diploma. That includes Stanford University, which last fall accepted 27% of home-schooled applicants – nearly double its overall acceptance rate.

- In addition to Stanford University, Yale and Harvard Universities were also among the top tier of colleges with the most home school-friendly admission policies. These colleges generally require SAT I (one) and/or ACT scores, a high school transcript, letters of recommendation, and writing samples. As of the National Center's 1999 survey, Harvard had anywhere from 20-40 home school graduates attending.

Registrars' Concerns Regarding Home-Educated Students

Registrars and admission officers that are unfamiliar with of home education will have concerns regarding their admission. As stated above, "While documentation and evaluation of home schooled applicants is problematic, it is not insurmountable". To facilitate decision making, the four following issues will be addressed:

1. Not enough known about the home school movement
2. Qualifying home-educated students for admission
3. Home school admission policy
4. Finding / Recruiting home-educated students

Learning About Home Schooling

There is no shortage of information available on the subject of home education/schooling. The following web sites are included as a good start to getting informative data on home schooling.

- Home School Legal Defense Association
- <http://www.hslda.org>
- Home School Legal Defense Association of Canada
- <http://www.hsldacanada.org>
- Educational Policy Analysis Archives
- <http://epaa.asu.edu>
- National Center For Home Education
- <http://nche.hslda.org>
- National Home Education Research Institute
- <http://www.nheri.org>
- Education Unlimited
- www.educationunlimited.ca/results.pdf

Qualifying Home School Students for Admissions

Qualifying students with a home-based education for post secondary admission is not a problem if they have been home schooled, that is, if they have followed the prescribed provincial program of studies and have arrived at the institution with a diploma and transcript in hand. These students are simply treated like every other applicant. Indeed, admissions officers may not even know that the diploma and transcript was earned at home. Students arriving at the institution without the diploma and transcript does pose a challenge, but not one that cannot be overcome.

The Registrar of the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, Mr. Don Yurchuk was perhaps representing the collective attitude of institutes of higher learning when he succinctly said "We are not in the business of denying students access to our institution"(Yurchuk, 1997). Institutions of higher learning, parents and students should have the common

objective of opportunity and success for all students. Home schooled students, for the most part, understand that institutes of higher learning have to evaluate each applicant to ascertain proficiency and the potential for success. Although it cannot be said of every university and college, evaluation of prospective students that do not have a public school transcript can be rather unpredictable, confusing, restrictive, and on occasion, even demeaning, resulting in the student perception of the registrar as the eliminator rather than the evaluator. As a consequence of these past experiences and because of the stringent enforcement of existing admission practices, home school students and parents have learned that of the alternative avenues available, persistence at demanding a fair appraisal on the part of the admission officer delivers the best results.

When evaluating a student for admission are we looking for a diploma or are we looking for the skills the diploma is supposed to represent? We have all heard the stories of students who's transcripts said they could but who's progress showed they couldn't. There is no question that standards must be established and met, but standards that evaluate standards tend to miss the point of standardization. By this I mean that if standards are to be a measure of the skills needed to succeed at a post secondary level, then those standards should be emphasizing the measurement of skills rather than how well a student has done against the standard curriculum. To standardize the curriculum, for example, in biology, and then to use that standard in evaluating a potential candidate is to say that biology can only be learned if it is done in the prescribed way. Curricular- based standards in biology measured by testing does not test the student's knowledge of biology but of the curriculum. In Alberta for instance, the grade 12 level provincial diploma exam measures student mastery of topics including; molecular genetics, cell division, inheritance patterns, population genetics, population ecology, symbiotic relationships, succession and portions of the human nervous, endocrine and reproductive system. If a home schooled student spent the year focusing on human anatomy in detail, they would do well on the few questions related to the nervous, endocrine and reproductive systems of the diploma exam but poorly on the other concepts, having perhaps studied them earlier in their programming. The resulting scores would indicate a poor knowledge of biology when in fact it is a poor knowledge of a rather fragmented curriculum. Furthermore the standards being measured by testing may be measuring more a student's ability to write tests than the mastery of concepts and needed skills.

While provincial standards may be a good measure of what a student has learned, they may not be a good indicator of what a student can do. Evaluation of home schooled students, therefore, should be made using skills-based assessments that can be met using any of a number of

available curricula and methodology rather than curricular-based assessments which is more concerned with process and procedure than purpose and product.

Each institution and each individual program has specified academic prerequisites and skills needed to succeed. The major skills required of most post secondary students include communication, mathematics and research skills, as well a good sense of discipline and self-motivation. Provincial standards may measure the first two skills directly but they can only provide a measure of the research skills, discipline and self-motivation by conjecture.

Creating Home School Admission Policy

While the establishment and use of standards is an integral part of evaluating student readiness for a post secondary program, the incorporation of these standards within a written admission policy is essential. Parents and students want to know what is required for admission. Well-defined requirements and expectations clearly spelled out in a written policy not only allows parents and students to know what is required but also provides the admissions officer with a consistent, fair and meaningful approach to evaluating potential post secondary students. There is virtually no institution of higher learning that does not have a standard admission policy. Most, however, are established on the assumption that all students have followed the prescribed provincial pathways and that all applicants can be evaluated using criteria based on these standards. As previously established, standards are more often a standardization of procedure than of product and so this criteria eliminates all students (products) who have not followed the standard procedure (school) to arrive at the door of the institution. A policy that direct everybody to have gathered knowledge in a similar manner is presumptuous and of no benefit to home schooled students who have most likely used alternate pathways.

The Canadian National Survey of Post Secondary Institutions' Admission Policies for Home-Educated Students indicated that while 72% of participating institutions had accepted home educated students, only 19% had a written home school policy(Gaumont, 2001). There is a real need for alternate admission policy that addresses all those for whom the standard admission policy doesn't work. This includes students from other provinces, adult students and, of course, home educated students. The most common alternate admission policy is "dealing with these students on an individual basis"(Gaumont,2001). While this does allow for the inclusion of home schooled students in the selection process, it leaves far too much room for inconsistency. Personal experience has demonstrated that this type of policy has a way of changing with each new registrar within a given institution and may also depend on who the

student is speaking to. A written alternative admission policy that specifically addresses home school students is recommended to avoid frustration and embarrassment on the part of all concerned.

When considering such a policy it is important to keep in mind that most home-educated students that apply to post secondary institutions are as well educated or better educated than their public school peers. To require higher standards of these students is simply unnecessary and discriminatory. Comparable standards are acceptable to home school applicants, but additional or higher requirements are bound to cause the student to go elsewhere and to brand the institution as unfriendly towards home schoolers within the home education community.

When dealing with students who have not attended a regular school, to ask for a transcript is of no use since a transcript only allows the registrar to compare a particular student with other students in school. Home educated students require an alternative form of verification of accomplishments. Some institutions have addressed this problem by providing home school applicants with a Home School Program Evaluation Form which allows the student to summarize what they have studied and how well they learned it. This information can also be provided by the student in their portfolio.

Of all the suggestions made towards policy development in the national survey report, only one was hotly contested in follow-up communications, and that was the suggestion that institutions accept parental input in evaluating home school students. Parents should be recognized as capable of objectively evaluating their childrens' academic competence and satisfactory completion of high school. They were, after all, the ones who witnessed every aspect of the student's development, a privilege no public high school teacher has. A parent's strong emotional tie to a child does not disqualify them from objectively assessing a child's progress, in fact parents who are intimately involved in the students life are very aware of the student's weaknesses as well as his/her strengths and so can be very much more demanding of their own child than a teacher can be of someone else's child.

Allowing a student to prove their academic prowess through probationary acceptance can be a way of qualifying a home educated student that has not provided sufficient documentation of their academic accomplishments. Although some students and parents would likely see this as an affront, most would probably agree that to be given a chance to prove oneself is far better than outright rejection. Different options could be used including night classes, summer school or correspondence/virtual school.

In an age of ever-changing technological advances, there has never been as great an opportunity for the expansion and globalization of post secondary institutions. Most respondents to the ongoing Alberta survey

have indicated that they either had online/distant programming or were working on it. Most home school students are well acquainted with learning using computers and the internet(Ray,1999). Alberta's own Athabasca University has developed a global reputation for their virtual programming where anybody over the age of 18 can apply, without having to provide a diploma, exception being made. Online classes are not limited by physical space, therefore, admission criteria does not have to be as stringent. Some US colleges have developed "Home School College Preparatory Courses" which can be accessed by any student anywhere in the world through the internet. Online programs such as these, would provide access to all aspiring students on a probationary basis to prove they are indeed capable of post secondary level training. Success would be indicative of the motivation, discipline and academic proficiency of the student, while failure on the part of the student would not present a problem, nor be a reflection of the post secondary institution. Should the student prove capable and be accepted as a resident student, credit for the preparatory course could be awarded towards certification.

(For an example of such programming see [http://www.oru.edu/university/departments/admissions/.](http://www.oru.edu/university/departments/admissions/))

Suggestions for Home School Admission Policy (Summary)

Having discussed the qualification of students and the issues therein, as well as the need for a written home school policy that clearly spells out a fair and equitable process to include home schoolers in the selection process, the following are suggestions that may be helpful in policy development. It is without doubt, impossible to arrive at a generic home school admission policy since every institution has its unique requirements and goals. These suggestions also neglect the organizational idiosyncrasies of very large institutions where the "personal touch" may not be as readily available as in smaller ones. In any case the following may be instructive.

No provincial diploma or GED

A provincial (government) diploma is a certificate issued by the public (government) school system to those who have attended the public (government) school system. Home educated students have not attended that system and so usually are not in possession of the provincially accredited diploma. Just as no one would expect to receive a diploma from one college by attending another, one should not expect a student who has attended an alternate school to be in possession of a public school diploma.

The General Equivalency Diploma (GED) sometimes jokingly referred to as the Good Enough Diploma comes with a stigma of failure or dropout.

Home school students have dropped out of the school system but have most definitely not dropped out of education nor have they dropped out of society.

Ascertain proficiency with standardized skills based assessments

Provincially generated final exams have all the makings of standardization but are really a measure of how well students have done on a prescribed curriculum. Having students verify academic proficiency using these tests is not much different than asking someone to write a plumbing test after having learned about electricity. In the United States, the multitude of curricula used from state to state has made curriculum-based testing all but useless in ascertaining college level proficiency. Americans have the skills-based SAT's and ACT's to act as a standard measurer of all students from across the United States regardless of where or how they have been educated. While some Canadian Institutions may use these tests, most would prefer a test that is more applicable to Canadian needs. The Canadian Test Of Basic Skills(CTBS) or the Canadian Achievement Test(CAT) are two instruments used to measure high school level academic proficiency. It is recommended that these tests be used to evaluate home educated students if standardized testing is deemed necessary.

Career Investigation Report

A career investigation report should be required of all students entering post secondary institutions that have career-specific programming. This report is to ascertain that the applicant has some knowledge of the career desired and has good reason for wanting to enroll in the program. Students discover the basic nature of the career in question through research, mentorship, volunteering, and interviews within the chosen field. Having students provide evidence of appropriate choice of career will help reduce student loss in the senior years of a program. I recommend that a career investigation report be a part of every portfolio.

Essay

Some of the post secondary institutions ascertain English writing proficiency by either given an Institutional English Exam or by asking the prospective student to write an essay. Writing an essay will provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate the ability to write, think and reason clearly and effectively. Asking a student for a bibliography helps the evaluator ascertain the level of proficiency and may be indicative of the students area of interest.

Interview / Portfolio

Although personal interviews may be more a policy requirement of smaller institutions, the low number of home school applicants may make this a reasonable method of qualifying a prospective student for any institution. An interview provides the evaluator with an opportunity to not only establish academic credentials but also to appraise the student's character and leadership skills. An interview also provides the admission officer an excellent opportunity to evaluate the prospective student's personal / career portfolio.

Personal / Career Portfolio

A personal /career portfolio is essentially an expanded résumé in a binder that includes collections and examples of achievements as well as an in depth record or journal of personal experiences and accomplishments. It should include a section that outlines the programs used in the home education, the content or description of such programs and the level of achievement in each. This section of the portfolio answers the need for a transcript and should give the admissions officer a good picture of the academic achievement of the prospective student.

Education is far more than marks on a transcript. A transcript will not give a good indication of the character of the student. A good portfolio will provide personal information that allows the reviewer to form an impression of what a prospective student is like.

Much can be learned through work or volunteering. A student portfolio should include as much information about what they have done as what they have learned. A record of work, volunteer, sports and leadership experiences gives the reviewer some information related to the skills and work ethic of the student.

A student's personal career portfolio will help the admissions officer to get to know the person making application as opposed to the marks making application. Mention is often given about educating the whole child but the standard methods of evaluation and selection often neglects most everything about a person except the marks. A well documented portfolio will provide some indication of the student's interests, strengths and skills, as well as, by implication, some of the student's shortcomings. It should allow the reviewer to get a relatively clear picture of who the student is in addition to what the student can do.

Finding / Recruiting Home-Educated Students

As mentioned earlier in this paper, institutions are not in the business of denying students access. The primary responsibility of a registrar is to attract, qualify and accept the best candidates for the positions available. Some parents and students will do everything possible to meet the demands and criteria of the institution but others will challenge the requirements if they feel they are unreasonable. Given the independent nature of home educating families and the knowledge that the home school movement is exploding, it would be in the best interest of post secondary institutions to make it known that they are open to do business with home schoolers. The first step is to have a specifically written, home school friendly policy. The best way to let home educating families know is to communicate with the provincial or local home school organizations, and when the opportunity arises to attend home school conventions and functions or make special presentations. Institutions may wish to advertise in their newsletters or in the growing number of home school magazines such as Homelearning Canada (<http://www.homelearningcanada.ca>)

Most institutions have open houses, recruitment drives, buddy days and other on-campus activities to help prospective students to get a feel for the institution. Make home schooled students aware of these activities.

A sure way to let students know that your institution is interested in home schoolers is to establish a scholarship fund specifically aimed at home educated students. Recognizing that home schoolers are among their most active students, several colleges in the United States have begun specifically recruiting home school graduates or offering home school scholarships, the value of which is determined by the amount of time spent in home education(www.hslda.org). (Chris Klicka of HSLDA writes, "...Belhaven College (MS) grants \$1,000 a year to qualified home educated students. Nyack College (NY) says their "experience with home schoolers has been a positive one" and awards up to \$12,000 to home schoolers. College of the Southwest (MN) which awards up to \$3,150 a year per home school student says that the general rule for home school students at the college is that they are "very involved in campus life in addition to doing well academically"(Klicka, 2002)).

Final Thoughts

No system or process is without its flaws and error, the exceptionally good and the exceptionally bad. The task of the registrar/admissions officer is not an easy one, as many of you already know, and having to come up with a fair and equitable solution to accommodate alternatively educated students is not a simple task. On the other hand, registrars may find that accepting home educated students comes with a higher probability of success than their public peers as some American institutions have found(www.hslda.org). Standards are as elusive as people are different, with everyone believing they are the best representative of it. Are the standards being used for admission progressively changing and are they keeping pace with our changing world? Students obtaining an education at home can accommodate change far more rapidly than a large system and should not be expected to accommodate the outmoded ways of that system.

There have been numerous studies done by both friend and foe on the demographics, merits, successes and failures of the home school movement, but all agree this is a trend that will not go away; that it is going to have a profound impact on our collective attitudes about education in relation to the public education system; and that it is going to continue to grow in acceptance and popularity. The post secondary institution's job is not to uphold an particular ideology, philosophy or pedagogy, but to provide a service in education for those that are willing and able to advance at higher levels. It is therefore imperative that all students, be given equal access on the basis of what they have learned as opposed to where they have learned it. Canadian post secondary institutions are encouraged to examine their admission criteria from the perspective of parents and students who have chosen to teach and learn at home and to ascertain they these entrance requirements acknowledge the fact that not all students arriving a the door of their institution will have used the most traveled pedagogical pathways. Registrars/admissions officers are also encouraged to follow the progress of their home school students. My experience with home education has led me to believe that they will do very well on the average and uphold the good name of your institution.

Thank you.

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