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College Recruitment...it's a FAMILY affair.

Enhancing the WMU recruitment process through understanding family influence

Jodi L. Ward, Associate Director of Admissions



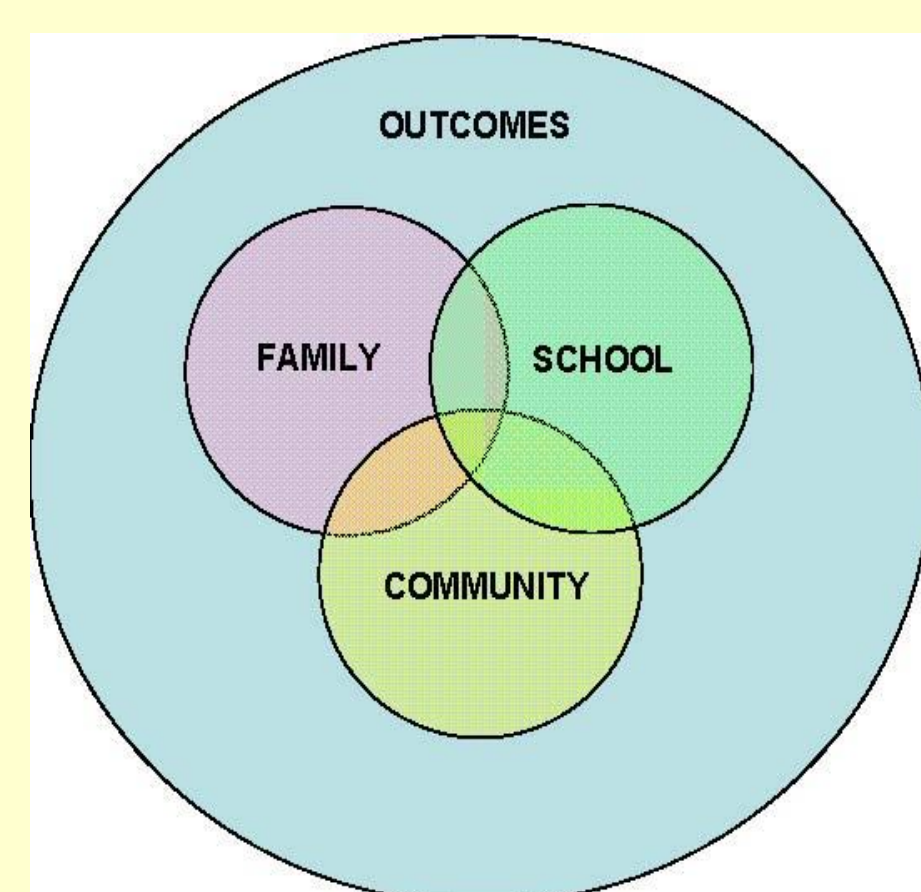
Objective, goals and outcomes

The purpose of this project was to bring attention to different family dynamics and the role that parents and guardians play in the college decision making process. This was done with the departmental goal of enhancing WMU recruitment and admissions efforts. This project is also supportive of the University's goal to build a foundation for student success.



Outcomes:

- 1) Provide training opportunities for WMU Admissions staff to help them understand differing family structures, how decisions are influenced, and the interconnectedness needed between families, school and the community to help support the student in their college career.
- 2) Create a bilingual recruitment brochure for families where Spanish is the primary language spoken.



Families come in all shapes and sizes

Today's family structure

- Nuclear
- Blended
- Extended
- Single parents
- Guardianship
- Same sex parents
- Foster parents

Families come in many shapes, sizes and structures. As such issues like family dynamics, cultural/community influences and parental styles need to be considered in the college recruitment process. In today's market, few college age students are making a decision about where to go to college and how to pay for it solely on their own (Gardner, 2007). A shift from student centered decision making to family or guardian centered is now a current trend in today's college admission.



Working with the "Helicopter" parent



Currently very little research has been presented on the topic of the 'helicopter' parent; i.e. a parent, guardian or support adult who is overly involved in a child's life actions and decisions (Somers and Settle, 2010). However, this phenomenon is a reality in college admissions. Parental figures that hover can be either a positive or a negative influence in a student's college transition. Understanding how helicopter parents influence the college decision making process can help recruiters better recognize and assist these families.

Characteristics of students heavily influenced by parental figures:

- Parents often chose high school courses for them or rearranged classes to have a different teacher.
- Parents apply pressure to go to a specific college or type of college
- Students visit websites, read brochures and travel on campus visits with their parental figures.
- Male students often report greater parental involvement than female students.

Family Decision Making

The present state of the economy has increased unemployment, flattened household incomes; devalued family wealth; constrained federal/state higher education support thus causing families to be more involved in a student's college selection process. Families have increasingly shifted from a price awareness to a value based assessment of colleges and universities (Hill, Pardieck, Stack, Vedick, 2010).

Students and their families will often weigh their options right down to the minutest of details. As a result of highly involved parents/guardians the decisions often come down to not just that of the prospective student but also that of the "co-purchaser".

College recruitment must be positioned in a "Consumer Approach" that illustrates the following:

- Investment value
- Strengths and Weaknesses
- Affordability
- Manageability
- Engagement/Social Integration
- Cost Benefit (ROI)
- Present Resources
- Future Resources



Recruiting students with Spanish speaking parents

Hispanics are now the largest minority group on the nation's four-year college campuses, according to an analysis of newly available U.S. Census Bureau data (Pew Hispanic Research Center, 2011). For the first time, the number of 18-24 year old Hispanics enrolled in college exceeded 2 million and reached a record 16.5% share of all college enrollments (four-year and two year combined).

To reach this growing population of prospective WMU students and to support family decision making in non English speaking homes a bilingual recruitment brochure has been proposed through this project. The concept piece would have WMU recruitment information in both English and Spanish.

In addition to printed material, it is recommended that bilingual electronic communication be explored as well; however that was not the focus of this project.

Following the trend: Currently, both Smith College (<http://www.smith.edu/admission/esp/parents/>) and Wesleyan University (www.wesleyan.edu/admission/en_espanol) University in New England have webpages that are available in English and Spanish.

(Spanish bilingual recruitment: concept piece)

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Training initiatives in Office of Admissions

Office of Admissions training initiatives:



A staff training program is being planned to explain and discuss family structure types, parental/cultural/community influence and engaged decision making. Additionally, use of proper terminology and sensitivity to differing parental/guardian dynamics will also be addressed.

- Ongoing education regarding family recruitment will be established and an article archive will be available to admissions staff via the Office of Admissions Training and Development ELearning website.
- The Office of Parent and Family Programs will provide training for staff about the resources available to students and families prior to fall recruitment efforts.

On campus family resources

The Office of Parent and Family Programs at Western Michigan University was established in 2007 to partner with parents, guardians and other family members to promote and encourage student learning, responsible independence, and personal development. This office provides information, advice and support services to help family members better understand the University experience and support their students. For more information visit:

www.wmich.edu/parents



References

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