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AP English Language

March 12, 2011

College Choices: Related to Relatives

Senior year and everyone buzzes about college. Applications need finishing, resumes need completing, and finances need re-examining. The students consider numerous institutions in an effort to find their ideal college. Time shortens and graduation approaches. What colleges do the students choose? How do they select these schools? Who affects these decisions?

These students endure the complicated college selection process with the help of friends, role models, and parents. Such important people in students' lives impact which colleges they choose. For example, friends typically want to stay together after high school so they try to attend the same institution, or they attempt to find schools near each other. At the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point (UWSP), a study noted that, "[o]f their contacts at UWSP, members of their peer group-friends attending UWSP or other UWSP students-are the most influential in their decision to attend UWSP" ("New Students' Reasons for Attending College" 3).

Parents, on the other hand, try to detect universities that include programs or activities that students would enjoy, or they aim to find institutions in specific locations. To support this, Terrence Willett found that parents especially sway students' decisions pertaining to community colleges (2). This reveals that parents help students pick schools to attend by locating those close to home or those with simple environments. Role models also shape students' college decisions ("CIRP Survey Results"). The students see their role models' successful actions and want to

accomplish those same achievements. If, say, a student's role model gained acceptance into Harvard, that student would aspire to gain acceptance there too. All in all, significant people in students' lives shape students' college choices.

Besides friends and role models, **siblings and other relatives are important people in students' lives**. Because students grow up with family members, these relatives know students' likes, dislikes, and interests. With this knowledge, family members can advise students about significant decisions. For instance, parents and siblings provide information and advice about universities to guide students in the complicated college selection process (Willett 1). Unfortunately, siblings can also negatively weight students' decisions. Sibling rivalry can cause a younger sibling to attend or avoid a particular university just because his or her older sibling chose that school. Endorsing this stance, Eileen Wilkinson, college counselor and former admissions director at Marymount University, advised parents to “[k]eep in mind...that for many younger siblings, college may be their first opportunity to live and learn in an environment where they cannot possibly be greeted with, ‘ooh, you’re X’s brother or sister’...” This shows that constant comparison to older siblings can influence younger siblings' life choices. Thus, by advising and pressuring students, siblings and other relatives become important people in students' lives.

As prominent people in students' lives, **siblings and relatives influence students' college attendance choices**. They can act as maps holding college information for the wandering high school senior. Acting as these influential information contacts, siblings and relatives can affect which institution a student chooses (“New Students' Reasons for Attending College” 3). Wilkinson qualified this by addressing the family's negative effects on future students. She

commented that “[f]or many younger siblings, the prospect of choosing a college is often saddled with self-imposed, and sometimes parental, pressure to meet standards set by an older sibling” (Wilkinson). These pressures affect younger siblings’ college choices. **Because siblings and other relatives are important people in a student’s life, their attendance at a college reflects the student’s college preferences.**

Family has influenced students’ judgments in the past. To support this, Wilkinson described an experience with two brothers, Steve and Michael, trying to pick universities to attend. She mentioned dealing with the younger brother: “Such was the case with Michael. He was clearly feeling pressure, and perhaps even a sense of letdown.... To add to Michael’s angst, his parents expressed hope that Michael might gain admission to the same college Steve attended” (Wilkinson). She explained, “My first goal in this process was to separate Michael’s journey from that of his brother’s, not simply because it was unlikely Michael would gain acceptance to the same college, but more so because that particular college, and even that ‘type’ of college, wouldn’t serve him well” (Wilkinson). She concluded by saying, “Over time, I learned that Michael had a wicked sense of humor, and a penchant for writing. He eventually chose a college where he could pursue creative writing and find success for himself” (Wilkinson). Her experience showed that, while able to successfully attend the same college, siblings may not always adapt to the same college atmosphere.

In addition to real-life examples, ample evidence supports the notion that siblings and other relatives affect students’ choices. For example, survey responses reveal significant evidence. In “New Students’ Reasons for Attending College,” nearly fifty percent of students surveyed responded that having a friend or relative attending UWSP influenced their decision to choose

UWSP (2). Experiences in the college field also reveal key information regarding university preferences. Wilkinson provided such evidence when she commented that “...many siblings happily attend the same college and achieve individual success...” (Wilkinson). Illustrated through numerical evidence and actual experience, evidence shows that siblings do not always need to attend different universities.

Opponents may contest that siblings and relatives do not change the college decision. For instance, Hoyt and Brown noted that their student survey respondents assigned low influence levels to parents’ attendance at a specific school (9). Like Hoyt and Brown, Wright and Nelson reported in their study that “Only a few applied to UCSC due to friends or relatives attending UCSC...” (21). Hoyt and Brown agreed by noting that a particular major or study program’s availability changed the college decision, not specific people (9). Wright and Nelson continued by naming location as the number one reason for application to UCSC, not familial influence (21). Although these studies have indicated other influences in the college decision process, Wilkinson’s experiences, the University of Illinois at Chicago’s research, the “New Students’ Reasons for Attending College” chart, and Terrence Willett’s findings support the idea that siblings and relatives affect college selections.

As senior year comes to a close, siblings’ and relatives’ advice and direction guide students to choose certain colleges. Acceptance letters materialize, rejection letters appear, and financial aid programs begin. Graduation finally arrives, and the seniors apprehensively and eagerly take to the stage. Speeches follow, and finally graduation concludes marking high school’s long-awaited end. Diplomas in hand, the seniors head to the colleges that they selected.

Works Cited

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