



Open Forum

Homeschool Recruiting: Lessons Learned on the Journey

by Gary Mason

I love working with homeschoolers! I am a veteran admission professional, and, over the last few years, I have enjoyed working with a new kind of prospective student—those who have been schooled at home during high school. Almost without exception, I have found these students to be friendly, polite, well-prepared, and appreciative of help.

As the number of homeschooling families continues to increase rapidly across the United States, many in higher education have begun to target this group as an emerging market to include in their recruitment plans. When I worked in the admission office at Ball State University (IN), we realized that the number of Indiana homeschoolers was growing and that most of the homeschoolers who were applying seemed well-prepared academically. I took on the duties of coordinator of homeschool relations, and we began to reach out more intentionally to the homeschool community.

Research showed that our homeschooled students had above-average SAT and ACT scores (1210 and 29 respectively). They also performed better academically. They had a combined cumulative grade point average of 3.47, compared to the 2.91 shared by the general student population. Through semi-structured interviews, I found they were also doing well socially.

These students were well prepared for college by their homeschooling experience. However, homeschoolers were often lacking the advantage of a guidance counselor to help them work through the college search and financial aid processes. Admission professionals can help fill this role by being available to answer questions and by directing students and families to helpful resources on the Internet. By helping families with general admission questions, I gained credibility as not just a

college marketer for my own institution, but as someone who truly wanted to help homeschoolers.

Because homeschooled students are coming from intimate environments, it is important that the recruitment techniques colleges use to reach them be personalized. As recruiters, we must be authentic and get to know families personally. Some colleges have begun to offer specific programs and services for homeschoolers. These include things such as special, smaller campus visit days designed exclusively for homeschoolers. Some colleges are also offering unique learning opportunities, helping provide classes homeschoolers may find difficult to teach on their own.

Homeschooling is a loosely-connected, grassroots movement. I found it important to make contacts within the various homeschool networks in Indiana. I met leaders from the Indiana Association of Home Educators, and we exhibited at their statewide convention each year. I joined the list-serve sponsored by the Indiana Home Education Network, and was a resource to homeschooling families across the state regarding high school curriculum and the college admission process. I became a member of the board of directors of the Indiana Foundation for Home Schooling. Through these and other relationships, we changed the perception of Ball State University from a school that was “way too big,” to a school that genuinely cared about and

Because homeschooled students are coming from intimate environments, it is important that the recruitment techniques colleges use to reach them be personalized.



Open Forum

understood homeschoolers and their unique needs.

One area of resistance that public colleges may encounter, in reaching out to homeschoolers, is that many of them have chosen to educate their children at home, at least in part, for religious reasons. They wanted to teach their children traditional Judeo-Christian values, rather than have them educated in the public school context, which can be secular and humanistic. For this reason, public colleges are often seen as the highest level, educationally, of what they have been trying to avoid. This is why it is so important for homeschool recruiters to get know families personally and help them understand that their students can attend a public college, get a good education at a cheaper cost, and still maintain their faith commitment. I can remember exhibiting at homeschool conferences and seeing families literally turn away from my table because I worked for a public university, but, over time, we were able to change peoples' perceptions and they began to seek out our table because they knew we were willing to help answer their questions.

Because of my connections with the homeschooling community, I recently became the director of admission at Patrick Henry College (VA), a new independent Christian liberal arts college near Washington, DC— an exciting opportunity. PHC grew out of the Christian homeschooling movement and has close ties to the Home School Legal Defense Association. The college is highly selective. We employ a classical liberal arts core curriculum and an apprenticeship model within the majors, and the majority of our students have homeschool backgrounds. We have

It is my hope that many other college admission professionals will recognize what a unique and wonderful group of students are represented in the homeschooling movement and will experience the kind of fulfilling interactions I have come to know.

found that homeschoolers are a good match for the kind of rigorous academic program we offer since they tend be highly-motivated, self-directed learners who are intellectually curious.

My journey working with homeschooled students in the college search process has been rich and rewarding. It is my hope that many other college admission professionals will recognize what a unique and wonderful group of students are represented in the homeschooling movement and will experience the kind of fulfilling interactions I have come to know. Homeschoolers represent more than just a growing market segment in college recruiting, they also make what we do a great deal of fun!



Gary Mason has worked professionally in the admission field for ten years. He attended Greenville College (IL), where he began as an admission counselor, following graduation. He worked in the admissions office at Asbury Theological Seminary (KY), and most recently at Ball State University (IN). He is currently director of admissions at Patrick Henry College (VA). He and his wife, Jill, have two children, ages 9 and 11, and he enjoys birdwatching, which fits in well with his admission travels.

Copyright of Journal of College Admission is the property of National Association of College Admissions Counselors and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.