



The College Choice

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How do people in the Mennonite Church decide whether to attend college? How do they choose a particular school to attend? Are parents and congregational leaders influential in the decision-making process? What role do friends play in deciding between a state university and a church college?

According to research by Don Hossler of Indiana University, the typical young person goes through at least three phases when considering the matter of college attendance.

1. Predisposition phase. Most youth make the decision for or against college while still in elementary school. The process is not usually conscious, but by the end of the elementary years, most students have already decided whether or not they will attend college. About 70 percent of current college students say they decided to attend college during their elementary years.

Parents have a major influence during this phase. As many as 50 percent of college students say their parents first encouraged them to plan for college. Numerous factors influence the direction of this initial phase: socioeconomic status of the family, academic abilities, quality of high school.

2. Search phase. During the junior high and early high school years those students who have decided to attend college usually begin to form a "set" of colleges from which they will later choose one to attend. This set of schools often includes three to five institutions, usually of a similar type. For example, a student and his/her family may be considering several state universities, or several private institutions.

Most students eventually enter one of the schools in this "set." This would suggest that if a student is not seriously considering a Mennonite college before reaching the 11th grade in high school, he or she will probably not enroll in a Mennonite school. During this phase the student is not particularly concerned about the specific strength of an

institution when compared to other colleges in the "set."

3. Choice phase. Most students narrow their options down to one school during the last two years of high school. This is the time to visit the campuses, talk to teachers, consult with adults, and identify the strengths of the colleges being considered.

Parents and other adults are influential in the decision regarding college choice. Parents should begin talking about college while their children are still in elementary school. During this phase it is most important to discuss the positive values of education.

As children enter junior high age it will be important to begin discussing Mennonite college options. Students should know about our church schools. Families can become better acquainted with church colleges by planning campus visits.

A church college education is more affordable than most people think. Over 80 percent of our Mennonite Church college students receive financial aid. Only a few pay the "sticker price" listed in college catalogs.

The vitality of the Mennonite Church and its mission is at stake. Those who attend a Mennonite college are more likely to be active in the Mennonite Church (according to at least two studies) than those who attend other schools or those who decide not to attend college. The majority of our church workers were educated in Mennonite colleges.

Congregations benefit when their youth study in church schools. The graduates are more likely to become active members and leaders, and they are aware of the global mission of the church. Their gifts are available for service.

It is true that our schools experience financial stress when enrollments decline (they had to add programs and building to accommodate the larger enrollments of the 1970s). The more critical factor, however, is what a lower percentage of youth in church schools means for the future of the church. It is a concern every member of the church should share.