



The Benefits of Higher Education for Women in Utah

Setting the Stage

Utah Women and Education Project researchers conducted in-depth research in 2010 to discover why more young women around the state were not attending and graduating from college. We discovered that many young women in Utah do not understand the broad value of a college education.

Most (96.3%) study participants understood that a college degree can benefit them financially; they knew they could potentially get a “good” or “higher paying job” if they had more education. Slightly over 32% also said additional education would help them have a better life, be successful, or have better future opportunities. Participants with college degrees felt more secure and prepared for the future. However, for many young women in Utah, the financial value of being educated is the only advantage they see. Therefore, if they do not plan to work outside the home after marriage, many do not perceive a need to be educated. A number of women said they did not get a degree because they did not believe they would ever use it. However, this notion is far from reality for many young females; researchers have found that a college degree can positively influence nearly all aspects of a woman’s life.

Study participants included 245 women between 18-32 years of age. They were White (89.9%), LDS (80.4%) married (44.1%), and from 16 different counties (Salt Lake/Utah, 56.2%).

Findings

Study participants mentioned other benefits resulting from a higher education, but it was typically those with more education who understood the additional benefits. For example:

- Slightly more than half (54%) understood that college would help them increase their knowledge, intellect, and lifelong learning skills.
- Only 41% believed that college could help them develop more self-esteem, self-worth, and self-awareness.
- Just 26% viewed college as something that could help them improve and develop.

- Only 20% believed they could use their degrees to teach their children and/or be positive examples to them.
- Just 15% felt college would help prepare them to “influence society” or “make a difference.”
- Merely 12% noted the social benefits college could bring (including meeting a potential spouse).
- Barely 8% noted that college could help them develop competencies like critical thinking, problem solving, decision making skills, and tolerance for the differences of others.

Interestingly, the majority of benefits listed on the next page were rarely mentioned by any participant. *A substantial number of young women do not understand the value of a comprehensive college education.* They believe useful college courses should teach them the exact skills they need to use in a job. Some young women also believe that it is a “waste of time and money” to attend any college unless they know “exactly” what they want to do with their degree. *Many of the perceptions of Utah young women are inaccurate,* and we believe that if more of them understood the broad value of obtaining a college degree they would begin to make higher education a top priority!

Key Takeaways

Researchers found a number of other important findings that are critical to uncovering reasons why many women do not participate and complete college:

- Many young women believe they are being encouraged to attend but not necessarily graduate from college.
- Nearly all young women in the study agreed that a college education is “very important” and “wonderful.” Yet, many do not see the urgency of attending college and completing their degrees.
- Study participants who had not attended or who had dropped out of college truly believe they will obtain degrees “sometime in the future.” However, statistics show that the majority of these women will never return.

- There is a much stronger likelihood that a woman will earn a college degree if she attends immediately after high school.

Potential Outcomes for Educated Women

Research has shown that people who are more educated are more likely to receive the following benefits and more:

Health & Wellbeing

- Live longer lives (on average).
- Have an overall healthier lifestyle (exercise more, healthier diet, lower alcohol abuse, lower cholesterol levels, higher fiber intake, smoke less).
- Are less overweight or obese.
- Have increased life satisfaction and overall happiness.
- Are more resilient and less depressed (better mental health).
- Obtain more resources to pay for health insurance.

Economic

- Earn more money.
- Have better job opportunities.
- Gain access to better health care and related benefits.
- Have lower risk of unemployment.
- Be better prepared to financially support self and family.

Intellectual/Cognitive

- Better lifelong learning skills.
- More intelligence/knowledge (e.g., English, science, math, social sciences, reading).
- Stronger teamwork and interpersonal skills.
- Increased ability to integrate ideas and concepts.
- Stronger writing and verbal skills.
- Higher critical and creative thinking, as well as decision making skills.
- Enhanced quantitative and analysis skills.

Parenting

- Give birth to healthier babies.
- Spend more time reading to their children.
- Prepare children better academically for school.
- Have children who participate in extracurricular activities.
- Provide healthier lifestyles for their children.
- Work higher paying, more flexible jobs.
- Have more college-educated children who can better provide for self and families.

Civic and Community Engagement

- Participate substantially more in civic and community activities (examples: voting, donating blood, filling leadership role).

- Be a conscientious civic and community volunteer.

Self-Development

- Improved self-understanding.
- Greater independence and feelings of control in life.
- Superior leadership skills.
- Higher ethical and moral standards and reasoning.
- Stronger social skills.
- Better self-concept/self-esteem.
- Openness to diversity and racial understanding.
- Greater ability to make reasoned, reflective judgments.
- Stimulating occupations.
- Increased quality of life.

Taking an Active Role

There are many ways that we can motivate, inspire, and prepare girls and young women for college. Here are a few that we can apply:

- Help young women and those who influence them (e.g., parents, teachers, counselors, church leaders, relatives, and employers) understand the broad value of getting a college education. For more information view the *Research and Policy Briefs* located on our website: utwomen.org
- Talk to girls, as young as possible, about going to college.
- Discuss with girls and young women the importance of graduating from college and not just attending college. Use the word “graduation” in more conversations.
- Encourage young women to attend college directly out of high school.
- Ask K-12 teachers to integrate assignments that help students research why college is important; invite guest speakers to discuss the college experience.

Conclusion

While a college degree can be a financial benefit, it also provides a better life and future opportunities. It is important for women to understand the value of a comprehensive college education.

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